



**"IT IS CURTAIN LECTURE TIME, VAN. PLEASE HOLD FORTH
WHILE I AM TAKING DOWN MY HAIR." Page 146.**

THE MAIDENHOOD SERIES.

THE ASBURY TWINS.

BY

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"LITTLE FLYAWAY SERIES," ETC.

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TO
PENN SHIRLEY,
WHO HAS HELPED WRITE IT,
I DEDICATE
THIS BOOK.

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THE ASBURY TWINS.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

“O DEAR!” said I. “Ditto,” said she. The rain was dripping into the cistern monotonously; the old year had just died of water on the brain; and here we were in the midst of a January thaw.

“The weather is a little depressing,” said I, “and the evenings are long. We need a special entertainment.”

“Let’s write the history of our lives,” suggested Van, playfully.

I started up.

“Van Asbury, we’ll do it!”

“Well, you write mine, Vic, and I’ll write yours.”

“No; let’s have it in the same book,” said I.

“You take one chapter and I another.”

“That style of memoir is n’t customary,” objected Van.

“Neither are twins customary, my love, but you see they are permitted; and really, Van, you and I have been together so much, and have become so mixed, that our story can’t be told any other way.”

And before she really knew I was in earnest, I dipped my pen into the head of the cross old man who served us as an inkstand, and began.

VIC'S STORY.

Nineteen and a half years ago, in the little village of Quinnebasset, in the State of Maine, an event occurred of the utmost importance to the humble heroines of this story : they were born.

I had two crowns on my head, and was named Victoria. They said I should eat my bread in two kingdoms, and I declared that wherever I went Vandelia should go too.

All the virtues were piled upon her, and they did n't seem to agree with her. She was rather a delicate child ; but I, with no good qualities to burden me, was as tough as a pine knot.

They say I used to lie and steal, and when I was punished my ditto begged to be punished too ; but I don't remember that. I remember wanting to run away to join a circus, only nothing would have induced me to part from Van. I skated with the boys while she sat by the edge of the pond wrapped in shawls. I climbed scaffolds for hens' nests, leaving her standing on the barn-floor with apron outspread, ready to receive the eggs. I shocked her by walking on tittlish places, and she shocked me by making friends with toads, which she said had beautiful eyes. She was always fond of pets, such as helpless animals, babies, and old people ; but when I asked her to climb trees, she answered, in her slow way, "I wish the trees had steps to 'em, and then I'd go up ; but I don't want to break my neck."

She was timid and gentle, but very set in her way : "a meetin'-house could n't be sotter." I was always in

mischievous, and she was always helping me out. I ate choke-cherries in school, and she hid the stones in her pocket. I was feruled by the teacher, and she reported at home, with a roll of her sympathetic, big eyes, "Vic did n't mean any harm, mamma, now truly she did n't."

I learned my lessons in a few minutes, and played all the rest of the time. Van did n't care much about either play or study. She was n't half awake in our little days; and, when we had any task assigned us, her favorite remark was this, with a drawl, —

"Won't it do just as well after supper?" But as she grew older, she gradually waked up, and is now better than I in everything but music and drawing.

Well, there were five of us, and I was "the only boy," so father said. All went well with the family till we were ten years old, and then things began to happen. Our dear mother died; and, two years after that, the next best woman that ever lived came to be our stepmother.

Then another change. When we were fourteen, father lost everything by fire and speculation, and we came down in the world, both literally and metaphorically: from the top of Jubilee Hill, to the very bottom of Prescott Valley.

The next year papa died. I did think it was too hard. Aunt Marian Hinsdale talked to me by the hour about resignation, but it only made me worse. I told Van if I was ever so resigned I would n't let that woman know it. I did have times of wishing I was a Christian; but then the idea of joining the church, and hearing Aunt Marian say, "See! this is my doings: I've brought her round!"

You perceive I was n't attached to Aunt Hinsdale, and when she said, "Victoria, it may be your father was called away for your sake, that you might be humbled and converted," I went into strong hysterics.

"I can't bear that," said I to Van. "Am I so much worse than other people that father had to die for my wickedness?"

"Don't mind her," returned Van, calmly. "Which knows most about God's ways and dealings, she or Uncle Charles? And you never'd hear *him* talking so."

Uncle Charles was Aunt Marian's husband, and our village pastor.

After father's death, our eldest sister, Helen, an extraordinary girl, supported the family, and managed to keep us twins at school most of the time.

At sixteen, we were still considered little girls; but the winter after we were seventeen the popular mind seemed to undergo a change on that subject, and we were invited to parties and treated like young ladies. Van crept into corners, and looked on; but I was n't afraid. Folks are only folks, after all; and I could n't see but Van and I were as nice as the generality.

It is time to describe our appearance. Stand up here, my double, and let me draw your portrait; yes, you must.

What say to that low, straight forehead, Vandyke-brown hair, clear-cut nose, and sweet, sensitive mouth?

That's Van. There's no pink about her; her face is a sort of luminous white, like snow at sunrise.

Now for Vic. Ahem! High forehead, irregular mouth,

—usually open; complexion, solferino and tan. The less said about noses the better.

Both of us have gray eyes; but Van's are larger and lighter than mine, and set in long, black fringe. They have more thought in them and less fun. Her hair curls naturally: mine I friz. Our height is the same, five feet four inches; but Van's neck is shorter, her waist larger, and her shoulders are broader than mine.

Well, our seventeenth winter was a very happy one. True, our two eldest sisters were engaged; but as it was chronic we did n't think much about it, till Helen decided to be married in April, and go to Rome with her husband, he being an artist.

As if that were not severe enough, Sharly decided to be married at the same time, and go to Philadelphia with her husband, he being an architect.

"Van," said I, "let's spread the big umbrella; it never rains but it pours."

It poured harder than ever when Morris Lynde, Helen's betrothed, came out with this startling proposition:

"Helen, why can't the twins go to Europe with us? I know of a good school in Paris where they can learn French and music."

I clapped my hands from the pure deliciousness of the idea. Van turned very pale. She would n't say a word for or against till she had had time to think. Mamma gave a little cry, and clasped us both in her arms.

"How can I part with my Duet?" said she.

"But, mother," said Helen, "if 't will fit them for teaching?"

Teaching? O dear, I never could get up the least enthusiasm about that. I wanted to do something extraordinary. While we were going on in this way, Aunt Marian dropped in. She had always felt the family on her mind, and said the twins would have to "come forward" when they lost Helen; but "they had n't half Helen's stamina, and could n't both together fill her place": it was a pleasing way Aunt Marian had of talking about us. We supposed she would disapprove of Paris, of course, for she throws cold water on everything from principle; but to our surprise she said at once, —

"Let the twins go; 't will be the making of them. Besides, Filura Wix is going."

"Aunt Filura!" we all exclaimed. She was an elderly maiden lady, living two miles above us in the Wix neighborhood.

"Yes, Deacon Zelig's family is in trouble. Mary, the one that married a Frenchman, is dead, and there are her four children in Paris now, without father or mother. No, the oldest one, Columbus, is in Massachusetts with his grandfather Zelig; but he is a young man; the three younger ones are in Paris."

We had always heard of Deacon Zelig. He lived somewhere in Massachusetts, and Aunt Filura Wix was his sister-in-law. We knew his son, Dr. Ezekiel Zelig, was going to Paris with Morris and Helen; but this was news about Miss Wix.

"It seems Ezekiel has been trying to prevail upon her for some time, and I think he has succeeded; for I met her at the post-office just now, and she says, 'Mrs. Hinsdale, this does look to me like a leading of Provi-

dence. Since sister Polly died, and my home is broken up, I want to put myself where I'm most needed; and who needs me more than Mary's children?"

"O joyful! that settles it," said I.

"But seems to me she is too old to go to a strange country and learn new ways," observed mother. "And is she fitted to take care of children?"

"Eminently unfitted, sister Katharine. She lacks tact, and that's a great lack," said Aunt Marian, who ought to know, for nobody lacks it more than herself.

"How strange, though," said I, "that a relative of those sober, pious Wixes should have married a French dancing-master."

"Music-teacher, Victoria. Mary Zelig was a giddy young thing; you remind me of her sometimes; and while she was at boarding-school she fell in love with this Du Souchet and ran away with him."

"O auntie, how could she?"

"Because she was a headstrong girl, Victoria, and never asked the advice of her friends."

"O, I was only thinking it would have looked better if *he* had run away with *her*; more delicate, you know."

Aunt Hinsdale frowned severely.

"After all," said mamma, looking sober, "if Miss Wix is going, and will be there in Paris where she can have an eye to our twins, I don't know but I shall have to consent to let them go."

"Of course you will," said Helen, pressing her cheek close to Van's, and whispering something in her ear.

I saw how it would be, and before Aunt Hinsdale

left the house I had planned that Van and I would have our old black silks made over into travelling-wraps. They were n't good for much, and we could throw them away as soon as we got to Paris.

But I should think I had written enough for the first chapter, and now it is Van's turn.

CHAPTER II.

VAN'S STORY.

THE SLATE.

"If a youth passes by, it may happen, no doubt,
He may chance to look in, as I chance to look out."

VIC has forgotten to mention Mr. Ulmer, a young man who came to Quinnebasset sometimes to visit the Joneses. We had never seen him till the winter before we went to Paris, in May, though we had heard of him as a nephew of our distant relative, Mr. Daugherty.

As Vic said, "He was three fourths out of college, when he was attacked with sore-throat, and travelled round in the cold all winter trying to cure it." He often called at our house, and Aunt Marian at last said Vic was flirting with him.

"Mamma," said Vic, indignantly, "she thinks you ought to stand at the front door with a bowie-knife and revolver to warn young men away. If she only *would* attend to her own affairs!"

"His grandfather was a tin-pedler," said Aunt Marian one day, after a long investigation. "Now, peddling may be eminently respectable, but this was rather a common family all through, and the airs this

young man puts on don't help his appearance with discriminating people."

"But he will be rich some day," said Vic, defending him for the sake of opposition.

"Yes, Victoria, he may have something when Mr. Daugherty dies; but it is poor business waiting for dead men's shoes."

Mr. Ulmer knew nothing of our going to Europe, till he happened to visit Quinnebasset the Wednesday before we were to sail on Saturday.

Our new brother-in-law, Silas Hackett, was to make a political speech that night, and we had gone to the school-house to hear him. In the midst of the argument Mr. Lucius Ulmer walked in, with a bit of cedar in the button-hole of his coat. Everybody looked up, and Vic whispered to me, "Is n't he elegant?" I thought he was, though I did not admire him particularly. I don't think Vic did either, except that she liked to talk to him in her funny way. If she had really cared for him, would n't she have felt wretched at the thought of leaving him and crossing that dreadful ocean? I am sure she would. It was just a harmless little friendship, and never would have been anything more, if Aunt Marian had n't interfered.

Mr. Ulmer could not come near us all the evening, for the ladies and gentlemen sat in opposite parts of the house; but presently, while everybody was listening to the debate, he passed a slate along under the benches to Vic. It was addressed to her, but had to go through Aunt Marian's hands; and perhaps you'll hardly believe me when I tell you what that woman did,—the "inspector-general," we call her. She took

the slate, very deliberately turned it over, and began to read! I was sitting next, and reached out both hands, but she would not let go till she had devoured every word; and then she just erased the writing, and passed the slate back to Mr. Ulmer with a freezing bow.

She said afterwards that "she did exactly right, and her conscience was clear. Mother was n't there to have an eye to those twins; and of course she, their own aunt, was n't going to allow any private correspondence between Victoria and a stranger like that."

Ever so many people saw the slate go back, and a few looked amused. It was very mortifying. Vic's face blazed, and she caught up a spelling-book and wrote on the fly-leaf: "I don't thank you for that, Aunt Marian. If there's any *snubbing* to be done, I choose to do it myself."

It was a waste of words, for auntie calmly grasped the pencil and wrote in reply: "I intend to do my duty by my dead sister's children; and they will thank me for it when they are old enough to understand my motives."

I turned my back upon her then as an indignity; and Vic and I sat pinching each other all the rest of the evening. After a while Vic managed to look round and give Mr. Ulmer a droll little smile. He must have been feeling very uncomfortable, but that smile made it all right.

When we told mother the story, she said Aunt Marian was wrong, and so did Helen and Sharly.

"I could have shot her!" said Vic. "As if it were the least harm for the man to say good-by to me on a slate."

"How do you know it was good-by?" asked Sharly. "You didn't see it."

"O, maybe 'twas an offer, who knows?" said Vic, waltzing round Sharly. "Don't I wish he'd ask me to elope with him, though? I'd do it in a minute just to shock the 'inspector.'"

"Victoria!" said mother.

But none of us could help laughing, for Vic had begun to "perform." She dared not mimic Aunt Marian, it is strictly forbidden; but she mimicked "Aunt Marian at ninety."

"Yes," said she, shrinking her cheeks, and mumbling and shaking, "it was my *jewty* to inspect that slate. If Victory had seen it most likely she'd have eloped, just like that giddy Mary Zelig. I'm sure she would, for Victory is a headstrong girl, and never takes the advice of her friends."

We laughed so that Helen said we should n't get to sleep that night; and she carried Vic off, who revenged herself by mimicking brother Morris and brother Silas, which was the funniest of all.

Next morning Mr. Ulmer called to see "Miss Vic and Miss Van," and I had to go down too.

"You've no idea, Miss Victoria," said he, "how shocked I was last night to hear of your going to Europe,—you and your sister!"

"No more shocked than we were at first," said Vic; "why, it came upon us like a flash of lightning."

"O, if it is a new idea, I shall have to forgive you for not letting me know," said he, taking her hand, and immediately after taking mine also.

He held them both for half a minute, looking all

the while at Vic. He seemed to be distressed at the thought of parting with both of us, particularly with me.

"I expressed my regrets pretty strongly on that slate, which Mrs. Hinsdale did me the honor to read. Perhaps she thought I said more than I ought, to you and your sister," said he, with great dignity.

"Aunt Hinsdale is the plague of our lives," cried Vic. "We would keep it in the family if we could; but when she acts as she did last night, how can we?"

It was too bad for Mr. Ulmer to try at that late date to dissuade us from going, but he did. He said it would not be pleasant at all for us to be left alone in Paris, a wide and dangerous world; he had been there and knew all about it.

"But we shall be at boarding-school; that will be narrow enough," said Vic.

Mr. Ulmer shook his head.

"The Public College is better. But take my advice, and don't go to Paris at all. There is no such thing as home-life in it, and you'll be as frightened as two little — birds."

He was looking at Vic, and I didn't wonder he thought of a bird; she often reminds me of one, and did then, skimming across the room to get a photograph of Madame Rey's school to show Mr. Ulmer, and then standing near him peeping at it with her head on one side.

"Don't go," said he; "wait for me just a year or two, and then we'll make up a nice party. It will be so much pleasanter than just you four and Mr.

Daugherty, — did you know my uncle Paoli Daugherty is going? It is a singular coincidence, but he has taken passage in your ship."

"Why, there are a great many coincidences, seems to me," said Vic; "I never heard of so many. There were nine in our party before, — Mr. Daugherty will make the tenth."

Mr. Ulmer had not considered five enough, — us four and his uncle, — but he did not seem to like the idea of ten any better. He thought it would be *too much* of a crowd.

"There are the two musical people from New York," said Vic, counting on her fingers, "and then there is our neighbor, Miss Wix, and her two nephews from Massachusetts, Dr. Zelie, and Columbus Du Souchet"

"Columbus Du Souchet! Is *he* going?" cried Mr. Ulmer, with a sudden start.

"Yes, sir. Are you acquainted with him?"

"I knew him at one time in college," replied Mr. Ulmer, with evident embarrassment. "I did n't care to continue the acquaintance."

"Why, is n't he nice? I've heard he was very handsome," said Vic, innocently.

"We won't discuss him, if you please," said Mr. Ulmer, in a tone of great forbearance.

M. Du Souchet's name seemed to have a depressing effect upon him. He could not recover his spirits all the morning; but Vic was as gay as a lark.

"He is a little wilted, is n't he, looking at him in the light of a vegetable, you know?" said she, after he was gone.

He called twice a day till we left, and always asked

for Miss Vic and Miss Van; and mamma said I was obliged to go down, as politeness demanded it.

I am sure he did not know how he harangued, or how often he said "you and your sister." There was evidently something on his mind, and at last he ventured to ask if Vic would write him from Paris.

"O, I hate to write letters, but Van just enjoys it," said the little wretch.

"Of course I meant your sister, too," returned Mr. Ulmer, with a bow.

And I never said a word. I am just so slow-witted always

It ended next day in Vic's promising to write, if mamma was willing. She said to me, privately, it would be a capital way to tease Aunt Marian. That seemed to be all the inducement.

Mamma is always very easy about everything, and had n't any objection, provided it did n't interfere with Vic's studies.

"O, it is on purpose to help me in my studies," said Vic. "He is going to write in French, chiefly, and maybe he'll tuck in a few tracts once in a while,—should n't wonder. Now, mother, don't forget to tell Aunt Marian about this; drop a word accidentally, you know, and be sure to write me how it affects her."

"Why, it is a merely literary correspondence, as I understand it," said mother, thoughtfully, "and that is all I consent to. You are going to Paris to study, and flirtation and nonsense of that sort is out of order for the next two years; you must n't forget that."

"Yes, ma'am, oh, certainly. Life is a solemn thing," said Vic, pirouetting. "I shall practise music all day,

and conjugate French verbs all night ; and when you follow me to an early grave, Aunt Marian will say, 'Victoria *was* a headstrong girl ; I always knew she'd kill herself studying !' "

"You nonsensical child," laughed mamma ; "I wish I were going with you to keep you steady."

There had been a great deal said about mother's taking the two children and emigrating with us to France ; and if she had only felt—

But Vic won't let me finish the sentence.

CHAPTER III.

VIC'S STORY.

THE VOYAGE.

NO; for she isn't going to say what she ought. She ought to tell how demure and grandmotherly she looked when we were talking about Mr. Ulmer, and how mamma turned to her and said, —

"Vandelia, *you* feel the importance of the step you are taking; *you* know you are both fitting yourselves for teachers, and the closer you keep yourselves the better. *You* won't think of love-affairs; but I want you to be a restraint on your sister."

"Yes 'm," said Van, with a look of superhuman discretion.

I think this is worth mentioning, for I wish it understood that *I* was put in Van's care.

How she took care of me, and what came of it, it will be the purpose of this story to show; also, how she took care of herself.

Well, we shall have to pass over the double wedding — Helen's and Sharly's — which took place in the white church at Quinnebasset, behind the avenue of trees. I remember I said to Van then, "You and I can never have a double wedding, for you won't be ready till next day after."

On our way to Portland, in addition to our own

party, we had Miss Filura Wix and Mr. Ulmer. The latter was going with us to see his uncle safely embarked for Paris. Miss Wix had an exalted, absent-minded expression on her features, and a sort of coming-to-pieces look about her clothes. She said her dress had shrunk in a shower, and I saw her knock dents in her bonnet in alighting from the stage. I suppose she had dressed in a hurry that morning, for her false front had strayed to one side. Van turned round and straightened it, when no one was looking. Her nephew and grand-nephew were at the Portland depot waiting for her, having arrived from Boston by the morning train. In embracing them she was a good deal affected, and that affected her hair. "Well, Vandelia, I guess my collar needs fixing, too," said she; and, while Van was pinning it, Miss Wix introduced us to her nephew, Ezekiel Zelig. He remembered having seen us at Quinnebasset, and said Van looked just as she used to when she was a baby; which I should consider a doubtful compliment.

He was twenty-five, but seemed older. He wore plain studs, and a rubber watch-chain, showing that he had abjured the vanities of the world. He had rather severe-looking features, thick black hair, and a pale complexion. He was rather loose-jointed, and his manners were slipshod; if I should say awkward, that would suggest stiffness, and Dr. Zelig was anything but stiff.

I didn't fancy him much. He had the kind of eyes that seem to look right through you, and find out immediately that you don't amount to anything. They were what I call conglomerate eyes, made up of two or three colors.

"I suppose this is your first sea-voyage, Miss Evangeline?" said he.

"Her name is Vandelia," returned I, correcting him. "Yes, sir, we have never crossed the ocean before; have you?"

"O yes, I have already spent several years in Paris — I studied medicine there;" and then he turned, with a look of pride, and introduced his nephew, Columbus Du Souchet, — pronounced Du Sooshy. Think of a Frenchman dubbed Columbus! "Phœbus, what a name!"

He was at his grandfather Zelie's when his mother, "the headstrong Mary Zelie," died in Paris. Indeed, he had spent half his life in Massachusetts, and, since graduating at Harvard, had been studying with his uncle, Dr. Zelie. He was now returning to Paris, to live with his brother and sisters, and finish his medical education. Mr. Ulmer's remarks had prejudiced me against him; but he certainly had pleasing manners, was remarkably handsome, and shook hands cordially. This was all I observed about him at first, except that he was very near-sighted, and that he pinned his neck-tie with a silver death's-head and cross-bones — such a cheerful idea!

At the Falmouth Hotel we met Morris's friends, Mr. and Miss Theobold, a musical brother and sister bound for Germany. Mr. Ulmer's uncle was there, too, Mr. Paoli Daugherty of Boston, — pronounced Dowerty, but Miss Wix called him *Doggerty*. He was an old gentleman of perhaps sixty, with a sickly complexion, round china-blue eyes, set in gold-rimmed spectacles, and a circumflex mouth. He was a childless widower,

with a good deal of money, very little health, and less spirits, and was going to France on business, and to try a change of climate. He was a cousin of papa's, knew us twins well, and would have kissed us if we had n't contrived to avoid it.

The moment he saw Miss Wix, he reminded her that they had been "rocked in the same cradle." I believe it was during their early infancy, when his mother visited her mother; and now they were to be rocked in the same cradle again — the cradle of the great deep — very romantic, you see.

Mr. Daugherty went on board the ship with our party that afternoon, in a most-doleful frame of mind.

"Don't be down-hearted, Uncle Paoli," we heard Mr. Ulmer say, as he bade him good-by, "you'll see me at Paris within a year."

Then the bell rang for the last time, the plank was drawn, and I was seized with homesickness in every fibre of my being.

"O Van," said I, "how could you let me come?"

"Did n't you say you longed for Paris?"

"Yes, but I'm always saying something I'm sorry for. You're my balance-wheel, Van; it's your duty to keep me straight."

Mother stood upon the wharf, on the other side of that dreadful widening channel of sea-water, waving her handkerchief, while Van and I waved the big bouquets Mr. Ulmer had just given us.

That was our last glimpse of home; for the "Prussian" was moving on like a sleepy leviathan, and presently we could discern nothing smaller than old Whitehead and the Twin Lights.

"That's over," said Van, slyly wiping her eyes, "but we'll try to keep up for Helen's sake."

"Don't fret about Helen, my dear; she has a husband to take care of her. If I control *myself*, it will be on account of the medical nephews and these warbling Theobolds."

"Van," added I, reflectively, "everybody we ever saw or heard of will arrive in Paris at last. Now, on board this very ship there are four going there besides ourselves: Uncle Paoli, Aunt Filura, Dr. Zelig, and the youth who discovered America. Lastly, Lucius Ulmer will appear before the year is out."

"Yes, I know."

"Let's be a little reserved in our manners during this voyage, Van, for we don't want to make new acquaintances, and have them calling on us at Madame Rey's."

I thought this was sensible, and was surprised to see Van smile.

"Suppose you keep that advice to yourself, Vic, my dear? Don't be offended; but Morris says he hopes you won't flirt on the high seas."

"Flirt on the high seas, indeed! As if I ever did it on the driest of dry land!"

Dear me! There came days and days in which I could hardly lift my head from the pillow, much less flirt, and, when I went on deck at last, was n't it to be expected that I should be light-headed? But Morris thought every word I spoke out to be well-weighed, just as dyspeptics weigh their food. I'm a dreadful sinner; but I told Van,

"'I will have my careless season,
Spite of melancholy reason,'"

And I don't want these over-particular people, like Morris Lynde, forever watching me."

Is it reasonable to suppose you want to marry every young man you meet? What if I did sing with Mr. Theobold? It is my duty to pick up musical ideas, if *that's* what you call flirting, and he was as melodious as an oratorio. Besides, he was a very diffident, unassuming young man, and I liked to make him feel comfortable. We had nice times together.

Van's sea-sickness was much more severe than mine. She did n't appear on deck for five days. When she came at last, Morris brought her in his arms, and laid her down on a cushion in the middle of the "bridal party."

"Let us have a grand combination concert in honor of her arrival," said Mr. Theobold; but in the midst of the arrangements Aunt Filura amused everybody by stepping up in that "shrunk dress," and exclaiming, in her single-minded way, "I want to look at Vandelia's tongue."

Well, we made out to get through the voyage somehow. One day the gray, silver-lined sea-gulls hovered over us, and the next we came in sight of rocks. It was the Irish coast. Mr. Theobold struck up "God Save the Queen," and Morris held poor, pale Van while she clapped her hands. Dr. Zelig said we must stay a while in Liverpool to let Van rest. It seemed a pity, for that broke up the party; and when we went to Paris we had to go alone, just by ourselves, Helen, Morris, and the twins.

CHAPTER IV.

VAN'S STORY.

MADAME REY'S.

"Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown."

MADAME REY'S boarding-school was in the suburbs of Paris, a place called Auteuil. And in this same Auteuil, between Madame Rey's and the river Seine, lived the Du Souchet family. We were thankful enough for this; for, as soon as we were fairly established at the school, Helen and Morris went off to Rome and left us, and we should have felt very forlorn if it had not been for the thought of Aunt Filura so near us. Many and many a time, when I woke in the night in our strange room, I remembered there was a bit of Quinnebasset in Auteuil, and it comforted me.

Our room had two iron bedsteads, two bureaus, a fireplace with a wee grate set in it, and one large window, opening lengthwise like two doors, and looking out upon the girls' playground. Beyond we could see nothing except a forest of trees, and but for one little loop-hole, where we got a glimpse of Paris, we should have thought we were ever so far back in the country.

The playground was surrounded by high walls covered with ivy, and was a sort of prison-yard, as we soon found, for the poor French girls, who were not permitted outside without a teacher.

As for Vic and myself, we were parlor-boarders, and were allowed the utmost liberty. We were to have private lessons in French, and Morris was to pay sixty dollars a month in gold. I heard him make the bargain with Madame Rey, and from that time the weight of a debt lay on my heart.

The school was a very fine establishment, and everything went on like clock-work. Vic and I were classed with the English girls, and ate with them; and every morning Madame Rey paid us the honor of a visit, while we were at breakfast. She was a large, gracious woman, and wore on her head a ruffled white cap, pinned at each side by two little gold balls.

When she entered the breakfast-room she kissed us all around, called us all sorts of pet names, her "soul," "heart," "angel," "life," "darling," "monkey," and even "cabbage." We were all *petites Anglaises*, though some of us had come from Cuba, and others from North and South America. Madame always conversed in French; but there was one English sentence which she was fond of using, "Do—you—pro—gress?"

After breakfast she kissed us again; and we were expected to return the salute on each of her fat cheeks, which felt like an elephant's skin, I used to think. She was certainly the fleshiest woman I ever saw.

She had very little to do with the school; but there were plenty of excellent teachers. Vic was to pay particular attention to music, a thing I would have been glad to do myself; but I am not strong, and it seemed more sensible for me to devote my time to other studies, particularly as I have not a very correct

ear. Vic was shut up for several hours a day, in one of the little music-rooms, at a small piano. Her first teacher was Mademoiselle De Courcelle, who kept her arm round Vic's waist while she gave the lessons, and afterwards talked very foolishly about her lover, and her *dot*, or marriage portion, which she needed but could not get. Vic had no patience, hearing so much about mademoiselle's *mal du cœur*, — heart-ache, I suppose, — and she mimicked her languishing way of lolling about and saying she was *triste*.

Of course we formed an opinion of the French as soon as we had spoken to a dozen people; and we set down the whole nation as sentimental.

The teachers gave us very long lessons; and we had a pretty hard time at first, harder than we were willing to let our friends know.

For amusements, madame gave receptions every Saturday evening in her grand *salon*, which consisted of three parlors opening into one another by glass doors. Each parlor had a long window overlooking madame's private garden, which was in the very centre of the house; and what vegetable ornament do you suppose stood in the middle of the garden? A rhubarb plant! Vic said madame was "domestic in her tastes."

When these three parlors were thrown together they made an enormous, elegantly-furnished *salon*, and a fine place for masquerades, of which all the girls were very fond.

But the recreation we liked best was roaming about the city on Thursday afternoons. Morris had suggested it, and as we were parlor-boarders madame never

objected. Vic seemed to enjoy the thought of doing something Aunt Hinsdale would consider "eminently improper"; and, judging from the good lady's letters afterward, she was as much shocked as anybody could desire.

On one of these Thursday afternoons we were going to the bank for letters; and as usual we started off, with what Vic called our "three travelling-companions," namely, pocket-dictionary, plan of Paris, and umbrella, to take a boat down the Seine. Of the three we needed our umbrella the most, for the walls and pavements of Paris are all white, and glare like snow-drifts in the sun.

"So beautiful and peaceful everywhere," said Vic, as we locked arms and walked off keeping step to a polka, "I don't believe there has just been a war here, do you? Look at that man with loaves of bread strung on his arm; exactly like doughnuts, are n't they?"

"O Vic, the air is so full of delicious odors. How I do wish we could look through these garden walls!"

The private gardens all along the streets bewitched us; but they were shut away from us by high white walls covered with ivy leaves as large as your hand, and climbing roses of different colors,—for now it was June, the month of roses. These *jardins* were always beautiful, laid out in every imaginable pattern; and when we thought nobody was watching we just laid down our dictionary, plan of Paris, and umbrella, climbed up and took a peep. Bold, was n't it? But Vic was always suggesting some such performance.

That day somebody was watering one particular garden with a jointed hose, which sent a fine mist

over the flowers ; and we were so entertained that we gazed for a long time.

" Ah, young ladies, and how do the grounds please you?" said a voice in French close behind us.

I dropped so suddenly that I stepped into the umbrella, which was lying outspread upon the pavement.

" O Dr. Zelig," cried Vic, " how you frightened us ! I thought it was a policeman."

She picked up the umbrella, and looked at the doctor with great dignity ; for he seemed quite amused by our appearance, and she can't endure ridicule. Morris had asked him to take a little oversight of us, and he had called at Madame Rey's just once during the three weeks we had been there.

" ' Zekle crep' up quite unbeknown,' " remarked Vic, afterwards. " I wonder if that's the way he takes an oversight?"

He relieved us of the dictionary and plan of Paris, and put them under his arm.

" I suppose you are on your way to the bank, and so am I," said he ; " will you allow me to walk with you?"

We should have preferred going by ourselves. Taking a boat down the Seine is a lovely little excursion, and we liked to make our own remarks and observations as we floated along. " The river is rather small and muddy, after all," said Vic, as we stepped into the boat.

That was true : but the people are very proud of it, and have spanned it every few rods with the most wonderful bridges ; and all along the banks are pic-

turesque little swimming-houses, or, at any rate, houses where people learn to swim. We landed at what I thought then was the finest part of Paris,—Place de la Concorde. Here we saw fountains with beautiful figures tossing water up and down, as if they enjoyed it. We saw the great Egyptian obelisk, with signs and wonders on it, which nobody can understand; and Dr. Zelig told us that on that very spot had once stood the frightful guillotine.

In going to the bank, we passed also through the *Champs Elysées*, the great pleasure-ground of Paris. We wouldn't have believed it then, but the time soon came when we were as indifferent to all these glorious wonders as we used to be to the great willow between Quinnebasset and Poonoosac.

The bank where we went for our letters is only for the English and Americans.

We had three letters; Dr. Zelig had five. We read them in the Elysian Fields, under an umbrella, with our backs to the old palace of Napoleon.

"My dear little duet," began mamma, "how I long to look over your shoulders as you open this sheet!"

"She would have a small chance under that umbrella," said Dr. Zelig, as Vic read the sentence aloud. She kept reading here and there a paragraph for his benefit, and I could not stop her.

"Pray what does she mean by calling you the 'duet'?" said he; "you don't seem much alike."

"Are the parts of a duet apt to be alike? Perhaps you don't know that there is a contralto and a soprano?"

"O yes, I'm wise enough for that; but which is which, in your case?"

"Guess."

"Well, I guess you are soprano and your sister is contralto."

"Right," said Vic, and began to read aloud again.

"O Dr. Zelig, I forgot we are keeping you waiting."

"And I forgot to tell you I was sent to invite you to tea. My Aunt Filura Wix is longing to see you, and I hope you have a little drawing towards her."

"Glorious! Out to tea in Paris!" cried Vic, pushing me with the umbrella-handle. "Do you hear, Van?"

We had called twice at the Du Souchets', and that was all. I dare say we both thought at the same moment what a pity it was we had n't worn our summer silks; but our merino walking-dresses would do very well.

"I have n't had such a sensation since Mate Willard invited us last fall to meet the poet that did n't come," said Vic.

"Yours is a real French house, now, is n't it, Dr. Zelig? No American ideas in it: that's the charm to us girls."

"Yes; it is Frenchified enough, both inside and out, for M. Du Souchet paid no regard to the wishes of my sister," said Dr. Zelig, with a severe look, as if he did not hold the memory of his brother-in-law in very high esteem.

M. Du Souchet had been a frivolous sort of man, and a great trial to his wife's family. Dr. Zelig seemed to grow cross from the moment he mentioned his name; and, after we had taken the boat and landed at Auteuil, he was still so cross that he almost annihilated two

beggar-boys who were following us, holding out some empty wine-glasses for sous.

"Out of the way, you little vagabonds," said he, in French; and they ran as if they were frightened.

Some of the most elegant suburban palaces I ever saw are in Auteuil; but the Du Souchets lived in a house which looked, at first sight, rather dark and uninviting. But if the outside was sombre, the inside was gay enough to atone: it was like a beautiful picture, after you have torn off its wrapper of brown paper. The parlor was just to Vic's taste. It was painted in a neutral tint, half-way between the faintest sea-shell pink and light buff. Round the panels were bands of faint pearl-gray, with here and there a line of gold. The chairs were of different shapes and materials, but all of the same color, though some were embroidered and others were plain. There was a plant-stand in the room, and a splendid piano of pale *bois de rose*,—not rosewood,—inlaid with plates of painted Sèvres. There were pictures on the walls, which must have cost a great deal of money; and the windows were richly curtained. It was shameful that Monsieur Du Souchet had bought all these fine things, yet left his family in debt when he died.

Dr. Zelig seated us, and went to speak to Miss Wix. Not two minutes afterwards, a chorus of screams came up to us from the unknown depths of the kitchen. We could not help rushing out to the hall to see what was the matter.

CHAPTER V.

VIC'S STORY.

TEAING OUT.

IT was only one of Aunt Filura's chemical experiments. She used to be always frightening her sister Polly in some such way at Quinnebasset. This time it was turpentine. She had some in a little dish on the back of the stove, and it was not too warm, but just warm enough, when Dr. Zelig entered the kitchen and said, "The twins have come." In the time it took to say that, and for her to answer, "Well, and I have n't changed my dress," the turpentine boiled over, of course; over, and up, and out, and everywhere, flaming and dancing like Vesuvius.

Van and I ran in the direction of the screams, to see who was killed; but by that time the flames were put out, and Henriette Du Souchet, Etienne, her little brother, and the servant-girl in white cap and white apron, were running round the little stone kitchen, laughing and crying. The ceiling and floor were as black as if ink-bottles had been thrown at them; and there stood Aunt Filura all serene, though she had been just on the point of going to heaven in a chariot of fire. "We've great reason to be thankful our lives are spared," said she, falling on her knees, and beginning to scrape up the pitch.

She never even spoke to us twins; but she looked so droll, with her cap tilted to one side, and such a resolute expression on her Roman nose, that I could n't help laughing.

Dr. Zelig scattered the children right and left, and set the servant-maid to work at the floor.

"Come away, Aunt Filura," said he; "this is no place for you, when you have company to tea."

"Well, but it is my own doings, Zekel, and it is a dreadful scrape; so I ought to be the one to see to it. How do you do, girls?"

"But, auntie, you couldn't clean this kitchen to-night to save your life. It will need a tub of lard, and half a box of soap, and the strength of ten men. Come, do get up, and come away."

"Well, perhaps I'd better," said Aunt Filura, with a tired smile; but in rising from her knees she was obliged to leave her shoes behind her.

We found afterwards that she had been trying to make some curtains for Clum Du Souchet's room. She thought his muslin ones were too old and thin, and painted shades would cost too much; so she had stretched a piece of cotton cloth on a frame, and stiffened it with beeswax and tallow, and was going to paint it green. She has made any quantity of such curtains for people in Quinnebasset, and they are very pretty.

"Is n't she so droll, so *comique*?" said Henriette Du Souchet, as Miss Wix pattered away to get another pair of shoes. "And then her gowns are so short. Do they *all* shrink, as she calls it?"

"Never mind her gowns, Henriette, she herself never



“AH! YOUNG LADIES; AND HOW DO THE GARDENS PLEASE YOU?”
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shrinks, — that is, never from duty," said Dr. Zelig, with a stern look at his niece, though I thought I saw a sparkle of fun in his eyes. Eyes like his, that are made up of so many colors, can express several feelings at once, and you can't always tell which is uppermost.

"Well, then, I won't criticise her dresses, it's her caps that are so queer, Nunky," said Henriette, patting Dr. Zelig's whiskers.

Miss Wix came back just then, and I could hardly keep my face straight; for of all the caps! I think Liddy Ann Crane, our Quinnebasset milliner, must have sat up nights to invent this one. But Van looked as sober as a judge: she thought it a shame to laugh at Miss Wix, and was sure she should never like Henriette, she was so two-sided, and so soft and slippery.

There were two Du Souchet girls, both very pretty and lady-like; but one was a trifle lame, and she and Van seemed to take to each other at once. Her name was Clarice, and she was about sixteen, — Dr. Zelig's favorite, as you could see. She and Henriette were finishing their education at the Public College, and were going to be very thorough scholars, we were told. Columbus, the oldest of the family, was twenty-one. He had been partially adopted by his grandparents, the Zeliges, when he was twelve years old, and since that time had lived almost entirely in Massachusetts, so that he seemed more like an American than any of the rest.

Then there was the little brother Etienne, about ten, and a dear child. He spoke English well, but preferred French. I like boys, and Etienne and I made friends at once.

Mr. Daugherty happened in before tea. I could n't help looking from him to Aunt Filura, and thinking of the difference in their faces. Hers had a rested, happy look, tired as she was; but as for Uncle Paoli's face, there did n't seem to be a good state of feeling among his features. His eyes slanted up, his mouth slanted down; his nose bulged out, his cheeks caved in; his beard grew down, and to offset it his hair stuck up. Altogether he did n't look resigned, and showed his rebellion against fate by coloring his hair.

Clum was late, and we waited tea for him. He was at the hospital seeing some one cut in pieces, very likely. When he came at last Dr. Zelie's face beamed, and both his sisters rushed up and kissed him. Fresh from the hospital! Ugh, he was n't fit to be kissed! He had left off the death's-head pin, and drawn his necktie through a gold ring, which had a livelier effect. He did not know us twins at first, being very near-sighted, but was delighted to see us, and handed us down to tea like a gentleman. Dr. Zelie did n't make the least attempt at good manners: he went alone behind Aunt Filura.

The supper-room was brown, with black mouldings, and the hanging lamp yellow and blue. On the table the chief dish was *crème frôte*, and you won't know what that is: it is balls of hot, creamy custard, in a frizzled golden batter; they burst in your mouth, and then melt. Oh, it was "most an excellent dish," as Aunt Filura said; but it takes the French to make it.

But best of all was a basket of cake. The only cake we had seen in France was the sort you call "lady-fingers," and we were just pining so for sweets that Van

was afraid we should seem greedy, and touched my foot under the table.

I felt perfectly at home : it seemed so like Quinnebasset to see Miss Wix hold the tea-pot at arm's-length and turn the tea in an acute angle ; it was just as she used to do when we went to see her and her sister Polly. I talked and laughed ; but Van had n't found her bearings yet, and was rather shy.

After supper Mr. Daugherty read the "*Figaro*"; and Miss Wix took out her knitting-work, while Dr. Zelig improved her mind and Van's by talking of parallaxes and the transit of Venus. They looked edified, and Dr. Zelig ran his fingers through his hair in the wisest manner ; but I did n't care a straw about the machinery of the stars ; never could understand how you get a parallax, or what you want of it after you get it.

Clum took me upon himself to entertain, and raced up stairs and down, bringing all sorts of curiosities that had been found in French caves and American corn-fields. He might assist in cutting up unpleasant dead people ; but it did n't seem to have sobered him as it had Dr. Zelig. He laughed often, showing a set of very white teeth ; and only looked solemn once during the evening, and that was when Miss Wix said I had a way of moving my head like "Mary Zelig." That was his mother, the one Aunt Marian called "giddy and headstrong." I guess she had the giddiness pretty well shaken out of her, by the looks of her photograph, taken a few years before her death.

After Clum had brought down a peck or so of fossils and such trash, he came to a portfolio of pictures. There were several nice engravings, and the usual

likenesses of distinguished poets and singers and actors, and of course "*our class*." I ran them over hastily, till I came to one face — or it was n't a face, it was a black shadow, a head draped in a veil. The features were so dimly outlined that you could n't guess what they looked like; only as you gazed you fancied you caught the gleam of a pair of very bright eyes.

"Who is she?" cried I.

Van came over to look.

"She!" echoed Clum. "How do you know it's a woman? Anybody could throw on a veil that way, just for fun. Might be myself, you know."

And he was carelessly brushing the picture one side, when his uncle came up and peeped over his shoulder. Their eyes met; and I was sure the doctor looked annoyed, if he *could* be annoyed by Clum.

But Van had n't seen the glance. "Do please tell me about that photograph," said she. "She did n't conceal her face because it was ugly, did she — like the veiled prophet?"

"Quite the contrary. Because she was so beautiful," said Clum, striking an attitude. Dr. Zelig stalked off with his hands behind him.

"Oh, I knew it," cried Van; "tell some more."

"Well, then, an alabaster complexion, diamond eyes, and ruby mouth inlaid with pearls."

"Fudge!" said Dr. Zelig, with a look at the plant-stand that threatened an early frost to the flowers.

"Why, Nunky, have I left out anything? You'd better describe her yourself."

"Yes, let Nunky do it, he's the one," said Henriette, laughing.

"Well, and what's her name?" went on Van, still gazing at the picture.

"Félicité," spoke up Dr. Zelig, with a smile of pure fun. I knew in a moment it was n't the right name; but Van accepted it as gospel-truth.

"Yes, Félicité," repeated Clum, solemnly.

"Where does she live?"

"Right here, on the banks of the Seine."

"Oh, how I wish I could see her, if she is as beautiful as you say!"

"Uncle Zeke, you hear that? Have you any remarks to offer?"

No answer.

"Has she really taken the veil?" pursued Van.

"Ask Uncle Zeke."

The door opened and shut. We looked up, and Uncle Zeke was gone. In a few minutes, little Etienne came in with a message from him, asking us to excuse him, as he was engaged in his study. Clum dropped his theatrical tone, looked conscience-stricken, and swept all the pictures back into the portfolio. He was perfectly devoted to his Uncle Zeke, and I thought was afraid he had vexed him.

"Well," said Miss Wix, who had seen nothing all this time but her knitting-work, "I've wondered how Zekiel could afford to spend this whole evening away from his books. He has n't done such a thing before since we came to Paris."

Vic and I remembered then that it was time to go home.

"Do come as often as you can," said Aunt Filura at

the front door; and then, dropping her voice, "I ain't an atom sorry I came to Paris, but things are kind of odd here, and you may depend it does me a sight of good to see a Quinnebasset face."

"Why won't you talk good grammar?" thought I, for I knew she was a remarkably well-informed woman.

"And it does us just as much good to see you," said Van, kissing her, though Miss Wix was n't one of the kissing sort.

Then Clum tucked one of us under each arm, and marched us off three abreast.

Not another word about Félicité; but when we were fairly in our room at Madame Rey's, Van said, —

"Would n't you like to see that veiled lady? She is probably going to be a nun."

"How do you know it's a lady? More likely it's Clum's old prex."

"Why, Vic! do you think Clum would lié?"

"I think you're an innocent, credulous little goosie, that's what I think. You take everybody in earnest, and make no allowance for jokes."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Van, mightily dignified.

"Besides, you stirred up a great commotion in Dr. Zelig's breast, and never mistrusted it."

"Dr. Zelig! What has he to do with it?"

"Engaged to her, very likely," said I.

"Oh, I thought a minute ago it was Clum's prex!"

"Maybe it is, and maybe it is n't. Anyway, there's a secret about it somehow, and you ought not to have tried to pry into it: but you are so unobserving, Van; you don't use your eyes half enough."

"You can use yours for both of us, it seems," said she, very primly, and began to put away our things.

Some might say she had sulks; but far be it from me to hint such a thing of my better half.

No! Spells of silence, stateliness, solemnity, hath Van, with a flavor of scrupulosity, superexaltation, and solemnity; but sulks—bless you, no, never!

CHAPTER VI.

VAN'S STORY.

FÉLICITÉ.

VIC might as well speak it right out. I was subject at times to fits of sulks, and went round looking as glum as Marley's ghost. Vic's little tiffs were soon over ; but mine were like the boy's hoarhound candy, — "the bitter kept on and on." I hate myself when I think of it.

I remember I made a cap next day for Aunt Filura, — plain, with soft little puffings of lace, — and we had a hard time getting lilac ribbon for it. We went shopping everywhere in Auteuil, but could not make anybody understand what color we wanted. Being very thirsty, and unable to procure a drink of water, we bought some lemonade of an old woman at the corner of a street ; but, alas ! it had no lemon in it, and was sweetened with licorice.

"Paris is a perfect cheat," said Vic. "If that old woman would only wear a black veil, and call herself Félicité, it would be very appropriate. Come, let's buy a tin dipper and some molasses, and go home and console ourselves with butter-scotch."

We bought the dipper ; but where was the molasses ? Not in Paris, or any of its suburbs, — the nearest

approach to it was dregs of honey. We bought some loaf-sugar, and went home in rather ill-humor.

Saturday afternoon we attempted the candy under difficulties. First, we must have some fire. We rang for a servant, gave her a franc, and asked for wood. About two hours afterward, a man came panting upstairs with a great load on his back.

"We are to have our money's worth this time," said I, as the man shuffled away with his straw shoes.

But no, the wood was laid "criss-cross," as they build log houses; there were only fifteen small sticks in all, with some tiny kindlings, no larger than the labels you put on plants. Then there were two things that looked like corn-cobs, but were shavings tightly rolled and covered with pitch. This was all.

"These corn-cobs are to light the fire with," said I, upon reflection.

"Only they won't light," said Vic, touching them with a match. But they did at last.

The sugar we pounded with a stone bottle, then set over the fire in the tin dipper with a little water, and stirred with a pen-stalk. When it was done we poured it into our soap-saucers.

"They ought to be buttered," said Vic: "but we're pilgrims and strangers; we mustn't expect too much in this world."

While we were pouring out the candy and shaking with laughter, there was a knock at our door. Columbus Du Souchet and his sister had called, and were waiting in the *salon*. Before they left they asked us to go with them next day to the little Protestant church behind the Arc d'Etoile, and we gladly consented.

"Perhaps Nunky will go too," said Henriette; "but I had n't the courage to ask him to-day."

"Uncle Zeke has a good deal on his mind lately," explained M. Du Souchet. It made you feel that Dr. Zelig must be quite a patriarch to hear these young people call him uncle.

"Do you remember the picture of the veiled lady, Miss Asbury?"

M. Du Souchet looked at me as he spoke. "Oh, yes, indeed; I remember the picture."

"Particularly the veil," added Vic.

"Oh, but that veil was pure nonsense. She only wears it in the street, as all ladies do," said M. Du Souchet.

"And in photograph-rooms," suggested Vic.

"Now look here," laughed M. Du Souchet, "did you think I was chaffing the other night, when I raved about her beauty?"

"Oh, no, she's a combination of diamonds and pearls and alabaster: we fully believe it."

"Ah, but you need n't smile; Henriette can testify that she is very handsome."

"Heavenly!" said Henriette, clasping her hands; "and, oh, such a toilette!"

"There, Vic, what did I tell you?" said I, triumphantly. "I knew it was a woman. And she really lives in a castle on the Seine!"

"A castle in Spain, more likely," interrupted Vic, saucily.

"Miss Van is right. She lives only a little way from here, as I think I told you, with her father and mother. But," added M. Du Souchet, in a lower tone, "Uncle Zeke has just been called to her father's death-bed."

"Well, there, that sounds like real flesh and blood," said Vic, relenting a little.

"He fell asleep, and can't be waked," added M. Du Souchet.

Just like our father, I thought. And then I asked how Félicité bore it.

"Félicité? O well, we'll call her that if you choose. Uncle Zeke has n't spoken of her by her true name since we came back to Paris. Have you observed it, Henriette? She bears it as well as she can, poor girl; but she is very much excited. There is no one in the world who has so much influence over her as Uncle Zeke; but she won't listen to him now, so her mother tells me, but keeps saying, 'You never lost a father, you don't know anything about it.'"

Ah, how well I understood that! Did n't Vic and I feel just so when papa fell asleep, and the Quinnebasset girls tried to console us?

"M. Du Souchet," said I, speaking the first thought that rose to my mind, "if somebody should go to Félicité whose father was dead, and had died in just that way, — in his sleep, I mean, — what effect would it have on her? I'd go in a minute, if 't would do any good."

"By Jove, I wish you could! You are one of the calm, reasonable kind, and I should n't wonder if you might hit the right chord."

That was all we said; but I kept thinking about it the whole evening. I remember particularly that Madame Rey entertained us that Saturday night with a lottery. She had Saturday receptions always, and regaled us "English" with crackers and weak tea or

wine : but this time she had cut up ribbons in strips a yard long, and numbered them ; and then she gave us lottery-tickets, and we drew pieces of the ribbon. It was very amusing to hear her quick, bright, graceful talk, though much of her wit was lost on Vic and myself. The main thing with me was that I hit upon some lilac ribbon, and plenty of it ; so that Aunt Filura's cap was finished at last.

The next Thursday we went to the city as usual, with our dictionary, plan of Paris, and umbrella ; and I carried the cap wrapped in white paper. The gardens, with their ivy-covered walls, were just as alluring as ever ; and Vic said, "Let's climb up and take a peep. There's nobody looking."

There was somebody looking on the other side of the wall, however, and to our surprise we found ourselves gazing straight into the eyes of Dr. Zelig.

"Do you haunt the gardens of Paris, sir?" cried Vic, very much ashamed.

He smiled, and offered us some buff roses he had in his hand.

"Well, I haunt this one occasionally. You remember this is where we met before."

"There, Van, that's just like you, you never know one place from another," said Vic, as if I were the ring-leader. "My sister's organ of locality is perfectly hollow, Dr. Zelig."

"Well, I'm sure these walls look very much alike," said I, clambering down slowly after Vic. "How can anybody tell?"

"Wait a moment," said Dr. Zelig. "I'd like to come out and speak to you."

We waited, and presently he came around by another street, and joined us. We had walked several rods before he spoke, and then he said, clearing his throat,—

“Miss Van, you have heard of my poor friend, Félicité?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And Clum tells me you have very kindly proposed playing the part of comforter to her?”

“I? O, Dr. Zelig, I only said —”

“It was a good, kind thought, Miss Van; but perhaps it is hardly best for you to go to see her just now.”

“Go to see her? Oh, I should n’t dare! I only happened to think of it that minute, while M. Du Souchet was talking. She is a great lady, and I never should dare.”

“How do you know she is a great lady? It seems to me you draw your inference from rather scant premises.”

“My sister Van is capable of making up stories out of whole cloth,” put in Vic; “in my infancy she used to invent fairy tales for my amusement.”

“Please hush!” said I. “Vic is a perfect hector, Dr. Zelig. The reason I thought Félicité a great lady was that Miss Henriette says she lives in an elegant mansion, and has servants, and a great deal of money.”

Dr. Zelig’s face clouded over as he answered, “Yes, that is all true; but what do such paltry distinctions amount to, when one is in real trouble? I told her of your sympathy for her, and she said, ‘Bless her dear little heart! Bring her to see me.’”

"Is she French?" asked Vic.

"Yes."

"I don't believe I'll let Van go, then. Is she a Roman Catholic?"

"No. It is a Protestant family."

"Well, I'll consider about it," said Vic, with such a care-worn air that Dr. Zelig laughed. He usually did laugh a little when Vic intended he should.

"But I was going to say," he continued, "it has occurred to me, Miss Van, that a letter from you might have a soothing effect upon her; at any rate, it would certainly gratify her extremely."

"O Dr. Zelig, does she understand English?"

"Not very well."

"And I don't understand French."

"Yes, she does, Dr. Zelig," said Vic, "and did before we left home; but Van's besetting sin is humility, as you may have observed."

Dr. Zelig took an envelope out of his pocket, and wrote something on it.

"Oh, but I don't wish to be understood as encouraging this correspondence," said Vic, as he handed me his friend's address, or her initials, "F. M."—why not the full name, I wondered?—"22 Rue de la Fontaine, Auteuil, Paris," shook hands cordially with both of us, and hurried away.

"There, I never liked him so well before," said Vic. "It is the first time he has seemed to show any feeling. But you've got yourself into a pretty scrape, young lady. I'm the harum-scarum one of the family, but I never carried on a clandestine correspondence with two initials in a crape veil."

We ran in at the Du Souchets' a moment, just to give Aunt Filura the cap. She seemed much gratified; and, when she was trying it on, that sly puss of a Henriette stole her old one away, and burnt it up. I found that Miss Wix had plenty of her own hair, though she kept it cropped close to her head. I determined to make her throw away her false front, if I could, though I said nothing about it at the time.

That night I wrote a letter to Félicité, but it did not suit me at all: it sounded stiff and cold.

"It is n't likely she'll answer it," said I, "and I rather hope she won't."

Two days passed; and every time the postman came Vic teased me. But on the third day a very dainty note, perfumed with heliotrope, was brought to our room, addressed to myself.

MY LITTLE EVANGEL:—

I think you mistake when you say your name is Vandella; it should be Evangeline; that means just what you are. Are you not an evangel to me? I have kissed your lovely letter, and pressed it a thousand times to my heart. The good God moved you to write it. It was he who gave you tender pity for a stranger's grief. Ah, yes! a quiet fell upon your father, and now it has fallen upon mine. They are both lying in their "white sleep," and we must wait so long—so long—before they waken! Pray for me, that I may not murmur.

But, little friend, if you knew the love I have lost! If you could guess the need I had to keep it! You have a twin sister, they tell me. How beautiful that is! I have seen you walking together, and there was joy in your faces. I envied you, as you looked at each other and smiled. I have no sister, no brother.

I could tell you so much, *ma chère amie*. My life has been a strange one; flowers at my feet, but often arrows of trouble

and death flying overhead. Shall I write you about it? My heart turns to you. I long to hear from you again.

Do not forget to send another word of sympathy, and I will bless you for it.

Ever your grateful

FÉLICITÉ. .

"A touching letter, is n't it?" said I; "and what a beautiful handwriting! So much firmness, yet delicacy of touch!"

"Yes, Van, considering she had to look through a crape veil."

"Please, Vic, don't harp on that veil. It was a mere freak, or accident, and you can see for yourself that she is now in real trouble."

"No, I can't. In the words of the immortal Betsey Prig to the immortal Sairey Gamp, 'I don't believe there's no sich a person.'"

Vic would laugh; but for my part I began to feel a real interest in Félicité, and resolved to write her again.

CHAPTER VII.

VIC'S STORY.

UNCLE PAOLI.

AN interest! My sister Vandelia behaved very much like a person falling in love. She watched eagerly for Félicité's letters, and was so absorbed in reading and answering them, that I had to cry "Fire!" to make her look up.

When she opened the second letter, out dropped a lovely little painting, a perfect bower of roses, with glimpses between of a fine old chateau.

"Well," said I, standing off to admire it, "there is one thing about your veiled lady — she does know how to handle a brush, that is, if she painted that picture."

"Well, she did," said Van; "she says so, and it is her own home. Of course we go right by it when we walk down the Rue de la Fontaine; but those great white walls shut it out from our sight."

"Unless we climb up and look over," said I. "Dear me, if I owned one of those beautiful villas, I should want the whole world to see it. I would n't hide behind a stone wall ten feet high, any more than I'd hide behind a crape veil."

But Van didn't hear a syllable. I stole Félicité's painting, and set it in a frame, in place of one of Murillo's pictures, then wrote under it "Félicité's Home,"

and hung it on the wall; but Van never looked up. "Fire!" cried I; "what is it now that is so very absorbing?"

"Oh, she is telling me a little of her history," said Van, going back to her reading, with her eyelashes winking very fast.

"Seems to me you spend a great deal of time over that girl," said I, out of all patience. as the letters came thicker and faster.

"Well, it is a good exercise in French," said Van, coolly; "as good as your letters from Mr. Ulmer, perhaps."

Methinks she cornered me there. Mr. Ulmer's letters were written in very poor French, not idiomatic at all; but he thought they were perfect, and if I attempted to criticise a phrase, he quoted more grammars and dictionaries than I ever heard of, to prove he was right. Half-a-dozen times I was just on the point of saying good-by to him; but Aunt Hinsdale wrote on purpose to say how shocked she had been to hear of the correspondence, and that settled it. I wouldn't have stopped then, if every letter of his had been charged with nitro-glycerine.

Well, I don't know what thread to pick up next in our story; for I can't remember dates as Van can. I think it must be time, though, to bring in Uncle Paoli. We have neglected him thus far most shamefully, and he was a person that never could bear neglect.

About this time, or somewhere along here, we were invited to meet him at the Du Souchets'. It was Thursday afternoon, of course; and we went to the city first, with our dictionary, plan of Paris, and um-

brella, though we no longer called for letters at the bank: those were brought to us now at Madame Rey's.

When we arrived at the Du Souchets', we found Henriette embroidering a pair of slippers, and Miss Wix dusting the parlor. She did house-work at very queer times, and in a very queer way. She was pranked out as to her head with Van's cap and her own short gray hair, which looked a thousand times better than the wiglet. Uncle Paoli walked in, just as she had mounted a stool and was dusting the tops of the lambrequins.

"Well," said he, bowing and smiling, "you're quite a housekeeper, ain't you, Filury? I like to see women work."

"Oh, I'm no great of a housekeeper, Mr. Doggerty. Sister Polly was the one that attended to that, and I earned the money. Polly said I had n't much faculty; and I believe she was about right," said Miss Wix, flourishing her duster with a heavenly smile. She was probably thinking of her dear Polly in the midst of an innumerable company of angels; for she did not descend from the stool, and forgot to offer Uncle Paoli a chair. He would have stood there till this time if Henriette had n't seated him; for he was a gentleman of the old school, very punctilious as to little foolish points of etiquette, though not at all refined, in the true sense of the word.

The most he cared for was money. People used to say he had been known to alight from his carriage to pick up a pin; but that must have been before he was afflicted with rheumatism.

He did not greet us as cordially as usual that after-

noon, and we soon found it was because we had n't returned his calls.

"I'm nothing but a poor lonely old man in a foreign country, and you don't care enough about me to come and see whether I'm dead or alive," said he, holding out his hand stiffly and solemnly, as if it had been a contribution-box.

I was n't going to take pains to apologize; but Van sweetly explained that we could n't find his street in our plan of Paris, whereupon we discovered that he had n't spelt it right on the card he gave us. Thus we were restored to favor, and thoroughly kissed—his forte was kissing. We were also permitted to read all his letters aloud. This blessing fell to Van, "who did n't mumble up her words, and speak so quick as Victory." Some of the letters were from Lucius Ulmer, and contained very polite requests for money. I could n't help hearing every word at the other end of the room; for Van had to raise her voice a good deal, on account of Mr. Daugherty's deafness.

"He's an extravagant fellow; Lucius is always travelling round for his health," said Mr. Daugherty, tapping his foot. "I don't believe in travelling for your health, unless you can make it pay in a *pecoonerary* point of view. Do you suppose I should have come out here to France, Vandeely, just for dyspepsy and rheumatism? Why, no, indeed; I had business to look after, or I should n't have come a step."

"How chipper you look, Filury!" said he, as she sat down to mend a pair of boots for Etienne, "and always at work! I guess the air agrees with you here."

"I should n't wonder if it did; but I never thought of it before," replied she, brandishing her awl.

"Such droll work for the parlor!" whispered Henriette. "Is n't she *comique*?"

"Well, the air don't agree with *me*. I don't see as I feel a mite better," grumbled Uncle Paoli.

"Perhaps you have n't a very good boarding-place?"

"Boarding-place! That shows how much you know about my proceedings, Filury! I thought you'd take a little interest in me, seeing we were rocked in the same cradle."

Aunt Filura looked very humble.

"How *do* you live then, Mr. Doggerty, if you don't board?"

"Why, it's a *floor*, or an *apartment*. I hire it, and live *en pension*," said he, with an accent too funny to be expressed on paper.

"*Ung-punching*?" repeated Aunt Filura, driving her awl. "May I inquire what that is?"

"Well, it means that I find my own meals. I have 'em brought to me; and I've got a little stove, where I can heat a tea-pot and a soapstone. If you'd do me the honor to come and see me, I'd show you how I live, Filury. I've got two rooms a-purpose so I can have callers; but it's a needless expense, for it is n't once in an age anybody calls."

"Well, Henriette promised to go with me sometime, and I've quite a curiosity about it," said Aunt Filura. "I'm sure I'm very glad you're so comfortably situated, Mr. Doggerty."

"Who said I was comfortably sitooated? Why, Filury, you really hurt my feelings! A man like me,

that's had a wife and children, and a *cuzzy* little home, redooed to living from hand to mouth in this way! Not a chick or a child; and out of health, too! I don't see how you can have the heart to talk about *my* being comfortably sitooated."

"I did n't mean to hurt your feelings, I'm sure, Mr. Doggerty. I was only thinking it was pleasant that you had money enough to spend just as you want to "

"Oh, yes; that's always the way, Filury. Everybody talks about my money, as if I was as rich as a Jew. I've got enough to keep me above want, as you may say, and that's about all. I may end my days in the poorhouse yet, if I ain't prudent."

"Miss Van," said Clum Du Souchet, who had just come in,—Uncle Paoli called him "Mr. De *Shoo-Shoo*,"—"how much is required to keep a person above want?"

"I can't say positively," replied Van; "I should think it would depend upon the person."

M. Du Souchet smiled approvingly. Van did n't speak unless she was spoken to, and the consequence was that all her remarks were appreciated.

Right behind "his boy" stood Uncle Zeke; and he also had a smile for Van, though he seemed in rather a dark mood that night. I was sure something was the matter; for his eyes were a sort of dyed-over brown, the lustre all rinsed out. I heard him say something to Van in a low tone about her kindness in writing to *Félicité*.

"Your sister has touched Uncle Zeke in the right spot," said Clum Du Souchet, coming round to my chair; "if I had only hit upon that idea of writing

to Félicité, it would have made him my friend for life."

Now it was evident that Dr. Zelig was entirely bound up in "his boy," so evident that Van and I had remarked it from the first; and I was moved to say, ironically, —

"Pity you could n't secure him for a friend!"

"Oh, you don't know anything about Uncle Zeke, Miss Vic. He pounces down upon a fellow pretty hard sometimes. It's work, work, with him, from morning till night; and he can't see that other folks need any fun."

"He seems very sober," said I; "is he always like this?"

"No, I don't know what to make of Uncle Zeke since we came to Paris. He is n't himself at all; sometimes I think there is some trouble between him and Félicité."

"Oh, he is engaged to Félicité, is he?"

"Yes, I suppose so; did n't you know it?"

"Oh, do tell me the story; it must be so romantic."

"Well, Uncle Zeke got his medical education in Paris; you've heard that?"

"Yes; he told me so."

"And to earn a little money while he was studying, he taught some classes in English. This young lady — she was very young then — was one of his pupils. She belonged to a wealthy family, and was a great beauty; but Uncle Zeke was just such a fool as to fall in love with her."

"I don't see anything very foolish in that."

"Don't you? Well, it was considered a great joke

at the time of it; for Uncle Zeke is a young man of very strong prejudices, and had always hated the French. He never could tolerate my father, just because he was a Frenchman; and he really thought it a family disgrace that mother married him. So, you see, there was some poetical justice in his falling into the same snare. Let me think—yes, that was four years ago, and they've been engaged ever since he was twenty-one."

"Well, that does n't sound a bit like what I've always heard of French girls," said I. "I thought they had a dowry, or *dot*, and their parents married them just as they pleased."

"Yes, that is true; but Félicité's father approved of Uncle Zeke. He was a medical man himself, and there was a great friendship between them. He had the impression somehow that Uncle Zeke was intended for something remarkable, and he wished his daughter to marry him."

"And now he is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead."

"Perhaps your uncle mourns for him, and that is why he is so sober."

"Certainly he mourns for him, Miss Vic; but that is n't all, for Uncle Zeke was as solemn as an owl before that."

Dr. Zelig had left the room long ago, or Clum would n't have dared tell all this.

"But there's one thing I don't understand," said I; "why is n't he willing to let Van or me know Félicité's real name?"

"That's what I don't understand myself. Oh, I think

there's some trouble in the camp. It looks like it, by Jove."

"He told us she did n't understand English," said I; "and you say she took lessons of him."

"Well, but I did n't say she learned anything, did I?" said Clum, showing his white teeth. "She was too pretty to learn anything. I tell you it's a great joke,—Uncle Zeke, so tremendously sensible and scientific, catching a butterfly like that!"

I did n't think it was remarkable at all; men are just so silly, the world over; but what surprised me was that the butterfly had let him catch her!

CHAPTER VIII.

VAN'S STORY.

AUNT FILURA TALKS.

IT was soon quite the usual thing for us to drink tea every Thursday at the Du Souchets'. Vic said the one great drawback was that Uncle Paoli had to be invited too, "to save his feelings." She said it was only our misfortune that he happened to be our sixteenth cousin, but we were made to suffer for it, as if it were a wilful sin.

But, then, the poor old soul! what was there in Paris to make him happy, compared with the sight of friendly faces? And we were all having such good times that we could afford to give him a little now and then out of our abundance. We didn't miss a pleasant word after we had spoken it; and I know he caught it up and treasured it. He had his best times at the "Du Shoo-Shoos'."

I had now been corresponding with Félicité more than a month; but we had never met. Her letters were not as sad as at first; but there was something about them, a certain "I-know-not-what," the French would call it, that interested me greatly.

One Thursday, when we went to the Du Souchets', I was thinking so much of Félicité that I did try to get up courage to ask Dr. Zélie some questions about her.

I wanted to know why she was not spoken of in the family, and why she did not let me see her ; but he was in one of his silent moods, and I gave it up in despair.

Presently, when I had forgotten the subject, and was sitting in a corner with Uncle Paoli, listening to an account of his rheumatism, and petting the cat, Dr. Zelig came and leaned over my chair, saying, with a pleasant smile, —

“ Would you like to go with me to-morrow to see Félicité ? ”

Uncle Paoli looked up reproachfully.

“ If you'd only raise your voice a little grain, I could hear you,” said he ; “ but it's impossible to understand people that mumble their words so.”

“ Will you go ? ” repeated the doctor, in a still lower tone.

“ Oh, yes, sir, thank you ; I'd be very glad.”

“ Well, at what hour shall I call ? When do you dine ? ”

“ At six.”

“ Then I'll call at seven. Will that be right ? ”

“ Just right, I think.”

“ Well, I did n't get hold of a word that time, not a single word,” exclaimed Uncle Paoli, as Dr. Zelig walked off. “ And I don't believe you either of you wanted me to hear. Why don't you come out plain, and own 't was privacy ? and then I should know how to take it.”

It was some time before he could be pacified, for it was not possible to go into explanations just then. Indeed, I hardly knew whether it was proper to speak of Félicité at all, for I had observed her name was never mentioned before Dr. Zelig.

Aunt Filura, or "Aunt Filly," as the children called her, sat near us, reading by the beautiful Roman lamp, with its three points of flame; and while she read she was knitting a sock for Etienne. She seemed as far away from us as if she had gone to another planet; only it was her habit now and then to startle us with a choice scrap of reading, and make some comment upon it. To-night, just as Clum had seated Vic at the piano, and they were selecting the music, Aunt Filura exclaimed, —

"Well, this writer thinks we human beings are of very little account, don't he? 'Of what consequence,'" said she, reading aloud in a sonorous voice, "'of what consequence is one of these human monads, of whom more than a thousand millions swarm on the surface of this all but invisible speck?'"

"'Speck' means the earth," explained Uncle Paoli to me.

"'Of what consequence is man, his pleasures or his pains?'"

"Sure enough," groaned Uncle Paoli, with his hand behind his best ear, "a poor dying worm, as you may say."

"Well, now, I don't look at it in that light," said Aunt Filura, with her peaceful smile. "The larger the universe, Mr. Doggerty, the greater the God who made it; don't you see?"

"Well, yes, ma'am, in one sense, as you may say."

"And the greater He is, the safer we can rest in Him; that's the way I take it."

Uncle Paoli looked up at the good woman reverentially; but she was quite lost in the vastness of her theme.

"Every time I read of a new discovery in science, it is as sweet to my soul as any of the promises: for it shows the Lord's condescension; it shows He can take in everything."

"Well, yes, Filury, that's so, as you may say."

"You see, Mr. Doggerty, He can remember the largest sun to keep it whirling; but that don't interfere an atom with his polishing off a fly's wing. Now, it seems to me that the very fact of such comprehensiveness —"

"Aunt Filly," broke in Etienne; but Dr. Zelig hushed him immediately.

"What were you saying, Aunt Filura?"

"I don't remember exactly. Only I can't for the life of me understand what right people have to say *anything* is of little consequence. How do they know? And what right have they to talk so about God, as if He was too far off even to see what is going on, when 'He is *in* all, and *through* all,' and it is 'in Him we live and move, and have our being'? These scientific men are very presuming, I think."

"I think so too, Aunt Filura. They try to 'read God's thoughts after Him,' and when they've found out a few little reasons for things, they grow very wise, look up to the heavens patronizingly, and say, 'Oh, we understand it all now. There's no God, but somehow there happened to be laws, and that explains everything.' Speak now, Etienne. What have you got to say? But don't interrupt people again when they are talking."

"They wanted to sing," said Etienne, looking withered under this reproof. ●

The children had to treat Aunt Filly with distinguished respect, or they got a scolding from Dr. Zelig. I wondered they could like him at all; but they had always been accustomed to look up to him as the family oracle and mainstay, and seemed to think he had a perfect right to speak his mind on any occasion.

The moment the singing began, he stalked out of the room. Clum inherited the talent for music, which had been his father's ruin; and "Uncle Zeke" was in torment whenever "his boy" approached the piano. He thought Clum ought to resist his love for music just as drunkards' sons fight against their love for strong drink. Clum did not see the necessity, and I imagine there was sometimes a little hard feeling on this account between uncle and nephew.

Vic began to play "Nearer, my God, to thee," and all of us joined in it but Aunt Filura, who has no ear for music, except, as Vic says, for the music of the spheres. True, Uncle Paoli dragged, and his poor old voice had a deep crack in it; but he threw back his head, shut his eyes, beat time with his foot, and seemed perfectly happy.

We sang several sacred airs, and I dreamed I was back in Quinebasset, at one of our Sabbath-school concerts. I could almost see the setting sun glowing on the upturned faces of the children, the teachers, and Dr. Prescott, and I could almost hear the chorus of young voices singing, —

"Softly now the light of day
Fades upon our sight away."

- Dear Dr. Prescott! Dear Quinebasset! When should
• I see them again!

"Well, Vandeely," said Uncle Paoli, slipping his hand into mine as the music ceased, "what are you thinking about now? or is it some more privacy?"

I almost snatched my hand away. His affectionate manners and his hurt feelings combined were too much for me sometimes. But the softening influence of those remembered Sabbath-school concerts was over me still; and I let my hand lie quiet, while I answered the poor old man respectfully.

"Well, Miss Van, I do admire your fortitude," spoke up M. Du Souchet from the velvet fauteuil near me. We had learned to pitch our voices so low that Uncle Paoli did not know we were speaking.

"My fortitude?"

"Yes; here you've been talking to that dreary old bore for a good half-hour, while the rest of us have been enjoying ourselves."

"Oh, well, M. Du Souchet, it's all owing to the memories of my childhood. Did you ever get to thinking of something very good, till you felt quite angelic, just for a few minutes?"

"Oh, yes, I understand that, Miss Van; I feel exactly so every time I think of my mother," said Clum, with tears in his eyes, but laughing next moment to hide them. "One thing about me, I have rather a heterogeneous childhood to look back upon: my mother a Protestant, and my father a Roman Catholic. Aunt Filly, don't you wonder I turned out the decent fellow I am?"

"Living with your grandfather's folks was the making of you," replied Aunt Filura, with unconscious pride.

"Well, but you know when I was a little fellow I used to confess all sorts of stuff to a priest. He was a fat old codger, took snuff, and went to sleep while I was rattling off my lesson. Oh, I remember that very well! I called him '*mon père*.' But I knew mother did n't believe in him, and I always pinned my faith to mother."

"That's where you were right, C'lumbus," said Aunt Filura. I never had the least thing to do with Catholics till I came to Paris, but I'm beginning to find out they are queer creatures. What do you think your girl said to me the other morning when she came home from mass?"

"Who, Julie?"

"Yes. I asked her what she had been doing at mass. 'I ate God,' said she. You may depend upon it, C'lumbus, I was shocked!"

"Oh, well, Aunt Filly, that is what she is taught, you know. I used to be told the wafer was really the body of Christ."

A shudder seemed to run over Aunt Filura from head to foot, and she dropped her knitting-work.

"Yes, I suppose so; and the poor girl ain't an atom to blame. But it's a dreadful thing to let her grow up in such darkness. I don't know how to go to work to set her right, though, there's the trouble. The aunt that has the care of her is a good Protestant, but she has n't done her duty."

When Aunt Filura began to talk it all had to be explained to Uncle Paoli. He and she had been "rocked in the same cradle," and he felt that he had a special claim on her, for that reason.

"Now, Filura," said he, in a tone of mild reproof, "have n't you got enough on your hands without turning missionary? Catholics will be Catholics, and you can't stop it, short of cutting their heads off. If I was in your place, I'd set her a good example, and let her believe what she's a mind to."

"Perhaps you're right," said Miss Wix, thoughtfully. "I never doubted but pious Catholics would be saved. It's no more than reasonable to suppose there will be allowances made —"

"Well, you've got ahead of me there, Filury! I don't see how anybody's going to be saved that puts more faith in the Virgin Mary than they do in Jesus Christ. Why, Filury, I thought you was Orthodox!"

Then they fell to "theologizing," as Vic calls it; Uncle Paoli's face looking rigidly righteous, Aunt Filura's radiant with love. He believed Julie was elected to wrath, I suppose, but it moved him not a bit; whereas Aunt Filura, who hoped better things, was yearning over the child, desiring to bring her to a full knowledge of the truth. Which had the spirit of Christ? I did not think it was Uncle Paoli.

I said to Vic after we got home that I almost wished Dr. Zélie would take Aunt Filura, instead of myself, to see Félicité. I began to be a little afraid of the undertaking.

"What good would it do for her to see Félicité?" said Vic. "She does n't know French enough to buy a potato; and how would she make out talking sentiment?"

"Well, her face would be enough, without her saying a word," said I.

Next day, as the time drew near when Dr. Zelle was to call for me, I had almost a panic. It gives you a strange feeling to think of meeting a person face to face, whom you've known only on paper. You can't help suspecting there has been some illusion on one side or the other, and dreading to put an end to it, for fear the reality won't be so pleasant. No description had been given me of Félicité; but I had pictured her to my mind as tall and dark, with starry eyes, and manners gentle but not languishing. I was sure, if she lolled about like Mademoiselle De Courcelle, Dr. Zelle would never have fancied her.

And how would she like poor little me? I dared not think about that. I made Vic oversee my laccs, and give a general air to my dress, while I repeated my little stock of French phrases, and tried to remember the different deaths in Félicité's family. She had lost two sisters and one brother.

"Don't laugh at me," said I, drawing on my gloves to descend; "but I have had all along a sort of superstitious feeling about Félicité, as if I had no business to meddle with her. There's witchcraft in it, Vic."

"Hush, child! Run along, and hold up your head like a lady. Remember you're as good as anybody, and they came very near running your father for Congress!"

CHAPTER IX.

VIC'S STORY.

VISITING FÉLICITÉ.

WELL, if the truth were known, I was a little uneasy about that presentiment which Van told of just as she went to call on Félicité. Van has been subject to presentiments from a child; and so have I, for that matter, but with this difference,—hers are apt to amount to something, mine never do.

I stood and looked at her as she walked off with Dr. Zélie, and thought what a face she had, full of sweetness and high religious principle. Talk of Aunt Filura's! Van's is one of the same kind, without the Roman nose and gray hair; and it suddenly occurred to me, "What if sometime somebody else should see her with my eyes, somebody of the dreadful other sex, I mean?" The thought was a brand-new one, and quite insupportable: I rushed up-stairs, and ate a *galette*—that's a tart—to make myself forget it.

Am I left to describe this visit? It appears so. Well, Dr. Zélie, in a very decent mood (for him), conducted her to the Félicité villa, which proved to be the identical place whose walls we had twice scaled under his supervision. The mansion was set in a bower of

trees and rose-bushes, just as it looked in the picture, only some of the roses had dropped off by this time, for it was growing late in the season.

"Does it look as well as you expected?" asked Dr. Zelig.

"It is Arcadia," said Van.

And then she thought of Félicité's father; and Dr. Zelig thought of him, too, for he repeated the words of that old cynic — was it Dr. Johnson? — "There is death even in Arcadia."

They stopped at the porter's lodge, as is the custom in France, rang a bell, and were admitted to the mansion by a portress. The room they entered was a double parlor; and Dr. Zelig opened the folding-doors and closed them after him, leaving Van alone in the front *salon*. It was such a marvel of elegance that she felt as if she had no right there; she, a little Quinnebasset girl. I presume she was in her lily-of-the-valley mood, sitting, looking at her little crossed hands, when the hall-door opened, and a lady sailed into the room like a black swan.

Everything about her was black, except a very small white middle to her crape-bordered handkerchief, and some puffs of pepper-and-salt hair under a white cap. Yet she was so effulgent somehow that Van felt as if she ought to be looked at through smoked glass. But, of course, it was not Félicité — she was much too old for that.

Van rose, and was trying to imitate one of Madame Rey's courtesies, when the stately lady drew her into her arms and kissed her.

"I am Félicité's mother," said she, in French; "and

you, my good child, are the little 'gospel' she talks of so much. Ah, yes; Dr. Zélie has told us of you." And she kissed her again. "But how it grieves me, my darling, to say to you that my poor Félicité is ill! She is *desolated* not to behold her charming friend; but just now it is impossible. It is a sudden attack. Her physician is with her this moment."

Van murmured that she was very sorry, which was true enough. The elegant mamma took her into the garden, gave her some choice flowers, saying all the while the most complimentary things, which Van only half understood, and begging her to come again, for Félicité would continue to be *desolated* till she should behold her, and other pretty French nonsense to the end of the chapter. It was like listening to music. Van followed, perfectly fascinated, till they came upon Dr. Zélie, wandering about the grounds; and after a few words between him and madame he took Van away. Neither of them spoke till they were fairly in the street, and then Dr. Zélie said,—

"Well, Miss Van?"

She looked up at him, and his lips were set together tight.

"Well, Dr. Zélie?"

"It was very unfortunate, and I consider that I owe you an apology."

"I don't see why, sir; how could *you* help it?"

Sweet simplicity! You see it had never occurred to Van to doubt Félicité's illness. Hadn't her own mother said she was sick?

"How could *you* help it, Dr. Zélie? You supposed she was well."

"Very true. When I saw her this morning she was in her usual health"

"But she is very ill now, and her physician is with her."

"Indeed!"

"Did n't her mother tell you so?"

"I did n't know she was as bad as that."

Van said she could n't help being struck with Dr. Zelig's appearance. He never manifested the slightest concern about Félicité, but curled his lip scornfully, and apologized again for Van's disappointment.

"I was afraid all the time it was rather bold in me to go," said poor little Van, not knowing quite what it meant. "I begin to think I intruded."

"No, you did n't," said Dr. Zelig; "you went at Félicité's request, and you went with me. Have you no more confidence in me than to suppose I would take you where you would not be welcome?"

I laughed when I heard of that. It seemed to me, if Van was so very welcome, Félicité might have let her come up to her chamber. She could n't have been so desperately sick, or that satin-smooth French mother of hers would n't have had time to meander in the garden and pick flowers.

"I don't understand it any better than you do," said Van, looking troubled; "but I have faith in Félicité."

"That's right," said I; "'Faith is the evidence of things unseen;' and, as you have n't seen Félicité, all you can do is to have faith in her."

But I myself had n't so much faith as the outside shell of a grain of mustard-seed. I can't say "I did n't believe there was no such a person," for I had reason to

think Félicité existed, and that she was engaged to Dr. Zélie; but I was pretty sure her mother had told a French lie, to get Van out of the house.

Next day a long letter from Félicité, full of "desolation." She was pining so to see Evangeline that she would n't probably have a happy moment till they met; but somehow she neglected to set a time for her to come again, and didn't promise to return her call. Van looked very sober, and did not answer the letter.

I thought that was the end of it; but soon after Félicité sent a basket of the loveliest flowers, with a billet-doux, that bewitched Van again. She could n't lose the correspondence; it broke her heart; Van was treating her cruelly (if she would pardon the remark). *O petits Evangeline*, have pity! And then she came out with the truth; it was Van's letters she wanted, not her visits; she would rather correspond with her than to see her.

That was the amount of it, though it was coated over with plenty of French sugar. That unfortunate visit! Alas, the disappointment had cost her many tears! but perhaps Van would n't have liked her so well if they had met, her eyes were so red, her heart was so heavy, her mind so *distract*. By and by she should feel more like herself; then she would call on Van, and take her to ride in her new *fiacre*, with two lovely ponies. But meanwhile, oh, meanwhile, Evangeline dearest, one more little letter!

Van swallowed the French sugar at one mouthful, took out her dictionary, and began to write. "After all, she did n't want to see Félicité," she said; "had always been afraid of strangers; and you know, Vic,

how I dreaded to call on her in the first place; but there's no harm in letters, and this correspondence is so romantic!"

"Vandelia Asbury," said I, "you've parted with your common sense! If you asked my advice, — which you don't, — I'd say, let this palavering French girl alone."

Van looked at me with a sweet little pleading smile, but kept on writing all the same. You may remember that she had n't been placed in my care — it was the other way about — she was to take care of herself and me too; and, as I said in the beginning of our story, you will please observe what came of it.

After this the letters went on and on.

"Dr. Zelig," said I, one night when we met at his house, "when are you going to take Van to see that invisible Infélicité again?" He turned upon me with one of his quick glances to see if I meant anything sarcastic. Félicité was a tabooed subject.

"I don't know. When I am particularly requested, perhaps. Would you like to go with us next time?"

"Thank you, sir; *I* never wrote to Félicité."

"No, you're a hard-hearted little thing."

"Is everybody hard-hearted who doesn't write to strangers?"

"Put the question the other way, Miss Vic. Can a person be hard-hearted who *does* write to strangers, from pure sympathy?"

And he gazed across the room at Van with a look as amiable as his peculiar combination of features would allow.

"Van is a pretty good child," said I. "But I

would n't be so sympathetic for a thousand dollars ; it's such a bother."

He laughed. He was perfectly fascinating whenever he laughed.

"You would n't be so confiding. You have n't so much faith in human nature as your sister has, and not so much imagination."

"Well, no, I should hope not !"

"When I called you hard-hearted, Victoria, I simply meant you are matter-of-fact."

"Did you? Glad you explained it. I don't consider myself so very much of a sinner for not falling in love with a thick black veil, and some violet ink and scented paper."

"Neither do I. I absolve you."

"Thank you, sir."

"But there's your sister, now ; look at those big organs of ideality on the sides of her head, near the forehead. They are as flighty as the wings on Mercury's slippers ; they take her where you can't go, Miss Vic."

"Yes, and where I don't want to go. Do you believe in phrenology, Dr. Zelie?"

"No ; only when it happens to agree with what I knew before."

"But how did you find out that Van has so much imagination? People in general don't mistrust it."

"No, she has the tact to keep it to herself."

"Well, but how did you find it out, then?"

"Merely by studying her."

"I should n't dare let her know that. It would frighten her to be studied. Did you ever study me?"

"Well, I've made the attempt"

"Dear me! I suppose you do it when you are sitting so glum, and appear to be thinking over hospital cases. It's downright sly of you. But tell me what you've discovered. Are Van and I alike?"

"Not much, as yet."

"What does 'as yet' mean?"

"Why, you are growing towards each other. People always do who live together; that is, if they are much attached."

"Well, go on now; compare us."

"Well, I'll compare you to a rabbit; you are always darting out of unexpected corners. As for Vandelina, let me see, I should compare her to a ship; everything in perfect order, only there must be a breeze, or she won't sail; let her alone, and she is too quiet."

"O fie, doctor, a ship and a rabbit! I never felt so small in my life. But tell some more. What are our tempers?"

"You have n't any — to speak of."

"What? I no temper? Why, I'm angry this minute."

"Well, I'm not afraid of you. You've only taken two or three waltzing-steps, and danced an extra sparkle into your eyes, and an extra color into your cheeks. It is perfectly harmless, and very becoming."

"Harmless! I've a great mind to fly into one of my cyclones of rage, and then I guess you'll be scared! But what about Van's temper?"

He shook his head. "Tough!"

"Why, Dr. Zelig, are n't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Then, you need n't have asked me the question, Miss Vic."

How true! But Van is a regular little Indian, and I was curious to see if he had found it out.

Here Etienne came along, and handed his uncle a photograph he had found on the floor. I could have boxed the child's ears, for it was a photograph of Mr. Ulmer; and before I had stopped to think, I exclaimed, "Oh, I dropped that out of my pocket!"

Dr. Zelig restored the picture to me with a look of surprise, and I blushed horridly.

"I gave it to Clum first, and he said he did n't see how it ever came in this house," said Etienne, the little wretch! I made up my mind I would n't go with him to see his rabbits that evening.

"By the way, Dr. Zelig," said I, for the sake of saying something, "have you a good, honest picture of Félicité? I *am* a little curious to see her — without her veil, I mean."

"I have no picture of her whatever," replied Dr. Zelig, and walked off. I had finished him for the evening. Like the man in the poem, "he never smiled again."

After we got home, I told Van Dr. Zelig had compared her to a ship, and her humble sister to a rabbit; and asked her to tell me what he himself was like.

"Like a dark lantern," said she.

I was struck with the force of her comparison. He could be as fascinating as — well, a Spanish bandit, when he chose: but, mind you, he did n't often choose; and I say this is positively sinful in a world where so many men are foreordained to be stupid. Occasion-

ally he flashed out with some unexpected brilliancy ; but before you 'd recovered from the dazzle he had shut himself up again, as Van said, like a dark lantern ; and there was no knowing when he would beam next, or in what direction. You couldn't help watching him, though ; you were curious to see this hidden light stream out. Still, as I told Van, I prefer people more of the comet order, that shine when they do shine, and then whisk off out of sight and hearing, instead of sitting round under a bushel.

But I firmly resolved I never would question him again about *Félicité*.

CHAPTER X.

VAN'S STORY.

HIDE AND SEEK.

VIC speaks of my friendship for Félicité as something rather absurd; but I was n't to be convinced of it then. I was naturally very set in my way, often to the extent of being foolish and disagreeable. I thought I was doing a good thing, to cheer a sad heart and practise my French at the same time. And then, too, Félicité's letters grew more and more charming. The sadness gradually died out of them;—and they were so full of buoyancy, good sense, piquant little sayings, and racy anecdotes, that I would n't have missed them for anything. I wondered how Columbus Du Souchet could have spoken of Félicité as a butterfly. I thought no one but a gifted and good woman could write as she did; and it was strange she should throw away so much time on a poor scribbler like me. I fell into the habit of translating her letters for mamma, only it was impossible always to convey the delicate shades of meaning into our colorless English: a flower is n't the same flower after you have dried and pressed it. Still mamma enjoyed Félicité at second hand, and, I am happy to say, approved of her. But the time came when I stopped translating.

One thing which added not a little zest to our

correspondence was the fact that Félicité knew all about my doings and goings, and seemed to be playfully watching me from a distance. She could distinguish me from Vic in any crowd, she said, by the feather in my hat, which scarcely stirred, or at most sailed slowly, while Vic's was in a continual dance. She knew my face, too, by heart, every feature of it, and approved of the warm tinge of yellow in my eyes — "It took the chill off the blue"; a French way of saying my eyes are gray. Whenever I went on the street after this, I was in quite a flutter, whether my feather betrayed it or not. I was n't used to being noticed, except as "Vic's sister"; but now, if a well-dressed lady happened to look at me, my heart beat, and I fancied I had found Félicité. The day we went to the French Protestant church with Clum Du Souchet, I was sure I saw her; and she looked like her mother, with the same liquid brown eyes, and the same queenly pose of the head. I gazed at her hard in passing out of church, and she gave me a smile — meant for forgiveness, I suppose; but I took it for a smile of recognition, till I heard a little child call her mamma, and then I knew it was not Félicité. During July, August, and September, I met countless Félicités, and so did Vic. It was a pleasant diversion; and at Aunt Filura's, every Thursday night, M. Du Souchet watched his opportunity, and asked me, laughing, —

"Well, have you found Félicité?"

Vic answered for me, "O yes, we've found her," and described some droll specimen, crooked or blind or half-witted, that we had met in our walks.

"You need n't be looking for a study in diseased

anatomy, girls. Félicité is one of the handsomest women in Paris."

"Poh, that's a fairy story, M. Du Souchet! You never heard of a handsome woman in your life that did n't want to be seen. I believe Félicité is a fright, or she would n't hide herself in this way."

"Ahem! Here comes Uncle Zeke. Let's talk about steamboats."

I always felt as if I were stealing, when I asked any questions about Félicité; and no one gave me the least information, not even Henriette. But I thought I knew her as a broad-minded, tender-hearted woman; and I told her a great many things on paper, which it surprises me now to remember. I told her how hard I had to study to keep up with my bright twin-sister, and how I hated myself sometimes for my sluggish temperament.

In reply, she said "she was glad I was not like Vic, always on wings; she enjoyed people who could be quiet. If she were a man, she should fall in love with me inevitably; but with Vic she should never get beyond admiration."

I was thoroughly amazed at this, and thought it must be because I had expressed sympathy for her in her trouble.

"O no, I had seen you before that. I knew your broad white forehead with its fine range of thought. I had even been near enough to look into the lucid gray depths of your eyes. Before you ever thought of writing to me, I told my friend Dr. Zelig I wanted to know you."

Vic laughed. "You are both falling in love," said she, "as straight as you can go." It may be true I

was a little in love. I wonder if what satisfies us most in love is not the appreciation we receive? We like to think somebody knows us and believes in us; then it seems that there must be something about us worth caring for, after all, and we hold our heads a little higher.

About this time, I remember I wrote an essay on friendship, exalting it far above love. I suppose it amused our professor, for he showed it to Madame Rey. She looked very mischievous, took her carved bottle out of her pocket, poured some snuff on the back of her fat hand, regaled her nose, and said, —

“All this you say of friendship is very charming, my little monkey; but let us wait a while, and then you’ll see new things, you little girl who know not love.”

Well, I did see new things presently, though not in the way madame predicted.

Meanwhile we were studying pretty hard, and having very pleasant evenings at the Du Souchets’. We met there a great many people, mostly young or middle-aged, but of various nationalities. It was a great help to our French, and Vic thoroughly enjoyed it; but I must say I preferred quiet talks with Clum, Dr. Zelig, and Aunt Filura. Clum wanted to draw me out before his friends, and I tried to be agreeable; but the more I tried the shyer I felt.

But Vic made up for my shortcomings. She was n’t afraid of king or kaiser, and there was nobody so quick at repartee, not one. It was n’t long before she could make her bright little speeches in French as well as English, and put on graceful foreign airs, which seemed as natural as life, and were positively bewitching. It

was easy for her to imitate what pleased her ; and to see her sometimes you would hardly have believed her a country girl, born and bred in Quinnebasset. She eclipsed Henriette, but Henriette revenged herself by insinuating that she never saw a young lady so exceedingly forward in her manners.

When gentlemen were present it was understood that Miss Wix was to play duenna ; but it was a very mild and harmless duenna, you may be sure, for when French was going on all she could do was to sit and smile.

More than once I heard Henriette make fun of the dear old lady, right before her face ; and Aunt Filura, without knowing what was said, would flush and look uncomfortable : but only for a moment ; she was so near heaven always, that nothing vexed her long.

As for Uncle Paoli, he was always there, "putting himself round in the way," he said ; and I was often fenced off in a corner with him for the whole evening. "There did n't seem to be anybody else he could have any rational conversation with, except Filury, and she was lost in a book. He got tired of so much piano-playing and hopping round ; it seemed silly and foolish."

I suppose it never occurred to him that we disturbed the rest of the people by talking so loud. But it was worst of all when he produced letters from his pocket, and asked me to "read them out." Sometimes they were from Mr. Ulmer ; and I had to raise my voice so much that all Lucius's family affairs became public property, also his modest requests for money. And sometimes Uncle Paoli volunteered remarks about Lucius, which made Vic blush at the farther end of the room.

"Soffy tells me the boy is carrying on a correspondence with some girl from your town, Vandeely. Have you any notion who it is? It's ridiculous for him to think of being married yet a while, and I'm going to tell him so. He's nothing to depend upon but this writing-business for the newspapers, and Lucius never *was* very rugged."

Then he complained of "the boy's" extravagance, and wound up usually by saying, "He need n't look for any of my property till I'm dead and gone; and I may end my days in the poorhouse, Vandeely; I ain't earning a cent."

Dr. Zelig did not spend much time in the parlor; but when he came in, and saw me shut off in the corner, he thought something ought to be done about it.

"You are too kind, Miss Van, too self-sacrificing, altogether."

Of course I had to explain that it was not disinterested kindness, it was mostly diffidence, that made me cling to Uncle Paoli. I knew I was n't an ornament to society, and I was glad to hide.

"You need n't have told of that, Vandelia. Why did n't you let me think you acted from pure benevolence?"

I looked up in surprise, for I did n't always know how to take Dr. Zelig.

"Many young ladies are not so scrupulous, let me tell you. They will accept undeserved compliments; yes, and do it very charmingly, too."

He spoke with a bitter sort of smile, as if he had some special case in his mind; some French girl, perhaps. He often said hard, sarcastic things like that,

and I thought he must be rather a misanthropic man. I did not know him then. I saw and understood so little!

Partly for my sake, I fear, parlor theatricals were proposed; but it was of no use, I could not shine. They were a great success, however, and were kept going all fall and winter.

Vic was in her element.

"Dress me up and put me on the boards," said she, "and I'm a blissful creature."

Her acting was often so delightfully funny that I have seen Dr. Zelie throw himself into a chair, perfectly helpless from laughter. It was worth something to make a man laugh who was so moody, and took life so hard.

All the Du Souchets had dramatic talent, especially Clum. I alone was a lay-figure.

"You haven't any great of a gift, that's a fact, Vandeely; you'd better come here and sit long o' me, and look on," said Uncle Paoli. So I drifted back to my corner again. Uncle Paoli enjoyed good acting, and did n't like to see it spoiled.

Poor little untalented me! I wondered if Félicité would rate me quite so highly, if she knew me just as I really was. Well, I could appreciate the fun, and that was more than Aunt Filura could do. She smiled whenever the rest of us laughed; but it seemed to be from pure benevolence, and to show she did n't consider our foolishness wicked. I think Clum was right when he said she was utterly destitute of a sense of humor.

She was very much tossed up and down in her mind about this time with regard to Julie, the Catholic servant-maid.

"I don't see as all my talking does her an atom of good," said she one evening, when there were no strangers present; "she cheats dreadfully."

"Oh, I thought you calculated the Catholics were about right, and going to be saved," retorted Uncle Paoli.

"I said *pious* Catholics, Mr. Doggerty; but you see, when I give Julie some money to pay the grocery bills, she keeps part of it herself, and I can't make her own it is wrong."

"Well, auntie," exclaimed Henriette, "she has always done just so, and the trades-people bear her out in it. Why *should* she think it is wrong?"

"I don't understand," said Vic.

"Why, the trades-people make our bills larger than they ought to be, just for the sake of letting Julie get a share. She pays them the money, and they give her back a little of it; that's all."

Vic and I were surprised to hear Henriette speak of it so coolly.

"Why, girls, all the servants act just so. They will do the marketing, and make their percentage, or they won't stay with you. They say it's their privilege."

"Privilege!" cried Uncle Paoli; "it's nothing short of swindling!"

"Yes," said Aunt Filura; "and I can't bear to have Zekel cheated out of so much money. It all falls back upon him."

The next thing we heard about it, Miss Wix had decided to send Julie away, and do the work herself. But the trouble was, Julie would n't go without a certificate of good character. Miss Wix appealed to "Zekel," in distress.

"What can the girl be thinking of to expect such a thing?"

"But it is the law," said Dr. Zelig, smiling at his aunt's horrified face; "you'll have to give her a good character, or you can't get rid of her."

"I had n't the faintest idea France was such an unprincipled place," said Miss Wix, more distressed than ever.

It ended in her keeping Julie, not because she wanted to, but because she "could n't sign her name to a bare-faced lie." But Julie never cheated afterwards. She had a Huguenot aunt in the city, who led a saintly life, and took care of Julie's young sisters. Perhaps this woman had a good influence over the girl, but I always thought Miss Wix was at the bottom of her sudden reformation.

"Madame Week (Miss Wix) is the best woman I ever saw," said Julie. "I know not what I would not do for her. Ah, she is like a saint in heaven! If I have a pain in my chest she makes me go to bed, and she steeps me beautiful *tisanes*! I think the Holy Virgin must love Madame Week, though she is not of the right religion, poor thing!"

Gay, pert Julie Papeneau! She was just the age of us twins; and I liked to steal into the kitchen, and talk French with her while she washed the dishes. She was very pious, in her way, and kept a silk chain round her neck, with a little bag attached to it, full of the bones of somebody—I think it was St. Francis; at any rate, it was her patron saint, and his relics protected her from fevers, she said.

CHAPTER XI.

VIC'S STORY.

VIC QUESTIONS.

MUCH obliged to my sweet sister Vandelia for her very charitable remarks about me in the last chapter; *but* I was behaving dreadfully. After the Theobolds came to Paris I was worse than ever. Van's little barque was steered by principle; but mine just floated about like a chip in a freshet. I was lazy-minded, I did n't study, I did n't read, I did n't care what became of the rest of the world if I only had a good time. I liked to be admired; "and there's where I missed it," as Uncle Paoli used to say in regard to his having neglected to take a second wife.

O well, we have to live one life before we learn how to live. If I could only begin at the beginning, and do it over again, I'd go out in that stone kitchen and talk with Julie Papeneau; for she died in the course of a year, poor thing! And I'd sit in the corner in the old-maidishest manner, and let Uncle Paoli grumble at me, because—well, you'll know by and by—I'd do two or three things I did n't do, I'll warrant you. But, then, there's this comfort in looking over my past life: I have served as a warning, and so done as much good as if I'd been an example. I'm glad I've made myself useful in my day and generation.

It was not only French people who came to the Du Souchets', but Spaniards, Italians, and I know not what all. Paris is "the home of nations," and if you can speak French you can get along with anybody, even the Poles. Still I enjoyed myself best with the Theobolds. They had been our fellow-passengers in crossing the ocean, had been in Germany all summer, and were to spend the winter in Paris. I could tell many things about them and a few other people; but what stands out most prominently just now is Van's affair with Félicité. That was approaching a crisis.

The letters were going on as usual. I had never taken the trouble to read them; but Van had favored me with extracts, expecting me to go into raptures, and I had tried my best, though, not having any poetry in my soul, I was n't always sure when it was the proper place to say "O exquisite!" But, by and by, Van ceased speaking of Félicité. I did n't observe this at first, for my mind was full of other things; but one evening, as I sat droning away at a letter to Mr. Ulmer, I heard a little sigh, looked up, and saw that Van was holding her pen in air, and staring into vacancy.

"What is it, dear? Has n't the dictionary a word that's good enough for Félicité?"

"Well, I don't know what I want to say, Vic, that's all."

"Ditto in my case," said I. "Van, you and I *are* kindred spirits, for my letters to Mr. Ulmer are a perfect drag. Come, now; you help me, and then I'll help you."

"Don't you wish we had gas in our room? These

tallow candles don't give half light enough," said Van, evasively, and looked so embarrassed that the bump of curiosity on the end of my nose began to tingle.

"Why, now I think of it, Van, I have n't seen any of Félicité's letters for ever so long. What did she write last?"

"Well, she wrote various things."

"You don't say so! Anything particular, special, extraordinary, un-read-aloud-able?"

"Well, yes, a little so," Van admitted.

I saw then that affairs were growing confidential, and all that was expected of me was to mind my own business. I did n't like it a bit. I never relished having people come to Van with their stupid privacy, and they were always doing it. I smiled in the sweetest manner, and began to drone away again at my letter; but I fancy my eyes had grown green.

For several days it was evident that something was troubling Van, though she did n't mean I should know it. She tried to appear as usual, and cleared her brows whenever I looked at her, as if she would say, —

"Oh, I'm not perplexed at all; or, at any rate, if I am, you must'nt suspect it."

It had something to do with Dr. Zelie; for she dropped her eyes if he happened to come near her, and seemed more than ever to draw off into corners.

"Pity Dr. Zelie is so disagreeable to you," said I, maliciously, after an evening at the Du Souchets'.

"Why, Vic, what an idea! I like him very much indeed!"

"Do you? That's more than I can say. I think he's an old bear."

"Well, he's rather cross ; but perhaps he has a great deal to trouble him."

"Ah, indeed !" said I, pricking up my ears. "Anything special?"

"Well, he has a great many poor people on his hands, for one thing. Clum tells me he is extremely kind to the poor."

"Well, I knew that before, but was n't aware it had been the means of souring his disposition."

Van laughed, and began to talk of other matters. If there was something preying upon Dr. Zelig's mind, I should never know of it through her. Then I began to look back upon the evening just passed ; and it struck me that Van had been unusually sober, and Dr. Zelig unusually cross. I had romped, and been a little too free with Mr. Theobald, I must confess ; but I did n't consider it any of "Uncle Zeke's" business, and was angry when he looked at me out of the corner of his eye, and began to scold Henriette for my benefit.

"Be more quiet in your manners, I beg of you," said he, in a low tone. Henriette was ready to cry.

"Oh, Nunky, what have I done? Just joked a little with Monsieur Lenoir."

"Never mind," whispered I, "don't you see he is whipping me over your shoulders? I'm the one that has been talking too much, and he thinks I've stepped out of my sphere."

He overheard me.

"Did I make any allusion to spheres?" said he.

"No, sir ; but you think women belong in them, I know you do ; you're just one of that kind."

It was saucy of me : but he was altogether too

cross, and I wanted to let him know I was n't afraid of him ; besides, it always put him in good humor to be answered sharply.

"Well, let's hear some more about woman's sphere," said he, blandly. "You're sure to have your views on the subject ; what is her sphere?"

"As nearly as I can understand it, sir, she is supposed to revolve around some object, is n't she? And I should say that object is — man."

"Come this way, Mr. Theobold," said Dr. Zelig. "Miss Victoria is explaining woman's sphere as a sort of solar system. Don't you want to come over here and get some light? So you set mankind in the middle, do you, Miss Vic? How flattering to us!"

"No, indeed, I don't, sir ; you set yourselves there. You've had it your own way, you know. We don't have the least thing to do about it, only just to whirl."

"Good," said Mr. Theobold ; "now I fully understand woman's mission. But what is man's, if you'll be so good as to inform us?"

"Man's mission? Man's mission? Why, I never heard the words before. I don't believe there is such a thing, Mr. Theobold. Men were sent into the world to watch us women, and keep us in our orbits. That's about enough, I should think."

"We do it by attraction, of course?" asked Dr. Zelig.

"Well, yes, there are such cases ; but, as a general thing, men try to keep us in our orbits by criticising us, and telling us if we don't do exactly thus and so they won't smile on us ; and that brings us round in a twinkling."

"I'm glad you appreciate our smiles," said Dr. Zelig, beaming out brightly; and after that he behaved like a gentleman. There's nothing like giving these lords of creation a piece of your mind once in a while. Goodness me! Was I going to be snubbed by Nunky? He need n't think he had been appointed my guardian!

Well, as I before remarked, Van was wonderfully quiet and serious that evening. Uncle Paoli kept her in the corner, "along o' him," and she chatted a little with Clum; but I saw that her eyes kept wandering towards Dr. Zelig with a tender, pitying look. He went up to her once, and tried to talk; but she shrank away, like the little shivering flower we children used to call "lady's ear-ring." It was only timidity; but perhaps he mistook it for aversion; at any rate, he immediately turned, and addressed his remarks to Uncle Paoli.

We went home rather late that night; and Van had n't much to say about the charades, or anything else. I went to sleep like a Christian, and supposed she did the same; but sometime in the little o'clocks I was wakened from a lovely dream by what seemed to be a moan, and next minute heard my ditto catch her breath in a quick sob. She was crying, and I did n't know why. To think it had come to this!

Van never was one of the tearful kind. I remember when we were very young I caught her once crying out in the barn behind the hay-mow, because Aunt Marian Hinsdale had said I, Victoria, was an awful acting girl, and there was n't much hope of my being saved. Dear little sister! Was she mourning again over my sins? What had I done now?

First I thought I'd let her know I was awake, next

I thought I would n't. Then I reflected that either way would be just wrong ; so I let myself alone to see what course I would take. Presently, I coughed faintly. All still from the other bed. I coughed again.

"Van, are you awake?"

She waited a moment ; then in the sweetest tone, like a dying dove, —

"Vic, dear, do you want anything?"

"Of course I do ; I want to know what ails my darling."

There was a muffled sound then, as if she were sobbing into her pillow.

"Van, I should think you might tell *me*. Ain't I 'your twin-sister?"

"It is n't — worth — mentioning."

"Oh, is n't it? Then try to roll it off your mind, Is it about me?"

"No ; oh, no !"

"I'm so glad ! But, Van, do stop crying."

"There, dear, I've stopped," said she, clearing up with a brave struggle, which distressed me more than her tears. I sprang out of my bed, crept into hers, and pressed my lips to her cheek.

"Now you can whisper, and not be afraid of the walls hearing. Tell me, Van, is n't it something about that old made-up *Félicité*?"

"Yes ; but, O Vic," said she, putting her arms round my neck, "you won't be sharp and say, 'I told you so.'"

"Never ! Do you take me for Aunt Marian Hinsdale?"

"You know, Vic, you never approved of my corresponding with *Félicité*."

“Well, no matter if I did n’t. Out with it. What has that wicked creature been saying to hurt your feelings?”

“O Vic, I’m not allowed to tell; and there’s the rub.”

“What a shame,” said I, “to bind you to secrecy, when you have a twin-sister! And, Van, I don’t mean to scold, but you were a goose to be bound!”

“I know it, dear; I’ve been lying here all night calling myself names, and the first thing I knew I was crying. It’s a miserable, miserable business, Vic; but, if I could only make a clean breast of it, I’d die happy.”

CHAPTER XII.

VAN'S STORY.

"PITY ZEKLE."

WELL, Vic has left off in such a critical place that I shall be obliged to explain matters right here; and there is no harm in doing it now, for the promise to Félicité was outlawed long ago.

I have told you how intimate we had become, so it was very natural that she should write, in one of her letters, "There is something I would like to say to you, Evangeline, if you'll promise not to tell any one, not even your ditto."

I hesitated, for I do hate to keep anything from Vic; but at last I promised. Then Félicité delayed a little. "It was a long story, and she would tell it by and by."

While I was waiting for it, however, a few things came to light which surprised me. Much of Félicité's wit that I had admired so much was borrowed, word for word, from French novels. I found it out when I was set to reading Victor Hugo, De Balzac, and other writers, and it troubled me exceedingly. The French people I had met thus far had not been very truthful; but I had supposed Félicité was an exception. I read in De Balzac, "Lying is to women the very foundation of language." O dear, was Félicité one of *his* sort?

Vic says I grew to be afraid of Dr. Zelig. I was

bewildered, I think, not knowing whether to pity or despise him. How could he help seeing Félicité was n't genuine? Why, he never would tolerate the whitest of lies in one of his nieces; and here he was engaged to a young lady, who borrowed by the half-page, without using quotation marks! But, then, maybe he did n't know it.

In one of Félicité's letters she happened to write, —

"If you visit me again, little one, I'll not go off riding to avoid you, as I did before."

She had forgotten that she pretended to be sick at that time.

All this was a sore blight to me, for I really loved Félicité. I suppose nobody will sympathize with me; but I felt for a long time as if the whole world was hollow. When I went to church the sermon didn't sound sincere, and even the music seemed a cheat.

Once we visited Notre Dame with Dr. Zelig, and heard the choicest voices sing of heaven in a burst of rapture; but it jarred on my ear, for I suddenly recollected it was all for effect, just like Félicité's fine talk. You would have thought the singers at Notre Dame had been sitting dreaming of heaven, till they could no longer contain their joy. But no, indeed: their illimitable happiness was limited by little whole notes and half-notes and rests; their enthusiasm must n't take them beyond certain bars; the gleeful quavering and semi-quavering must n't shake too high or too low; in short, it was all made up out of the singing-book.

"How did you like the music?" asked Dr. Zelig, as we were passing out of the chapel. Notre Dame is full of chapels.

"It was wonderful; but," said I, "I could n't help wishing people could sing as the birds do, just because they feel it, and not because the minister tells them to."

I did not suppose Dr. Zelig would understand; but it relieved me to speak out my feeling, foolish as it might sound.

"You need n't look so sober about it," said Vic, giving my arm a little pinch.

I looked up, and there stood — well, by the magnetic thrill that ran through me, I knew it was Félicité. I had seen her before, though never to feel sure it was she. Now she was looking at me with an indescribable curve of the eyebrow, which certainly spoke recognition. Such eyes! Such a face!

"She looked as she had fed on flowers,
And drunk the dews of Paradise."

From me she turned smiling towards Dr. Zelig. Both bowed; but next moment she had taken the arm of an elegant gentleman, and was swept away from our view. Dr. Zelig fell into a sort of black study.

"That's she," whispered Vic. "Ask him if it is n't."

I shook my head.

"Why, what are you afraid of? Then I'll ask him myself."

But she did not. I don't think she dared. She merely touched his arm, and said, "Dr. Zelig — Ah — well, are we going up-stairs?"

It was a mild way of saying we would ascend one of the towers. I shrank from the journey, for great heights made me giddy; but between Dr. Zelig and Vic I managed it.



"I LOOKED UP, AND THERE STOOD — FÉLICITÉ." Page 104.

"Two hundred and eighty steps," counted Vic. "I feel like a rising young woman."

We had come then to a little gallery, which winds round the tower. Dr. Zelig led the way, and we entered a small door, going up two flights, to see a bell that was brought from the siege of Sebastopol; but it looked like any bell, and was not half as interesting as the other one, which has eight tones, and is rung by machinery.

Then we went back to the spiral stairs, and all around the gallery to the other side of the tower, where the bell-ringer and his family lived. It seemed just like a story. The old man and his wife had several plants, which looked wonderfully fresh and beautiful, springing out of that solid mass of stone-work, so far above all vegetation. We wondered and admired. A bird, which was swinging in a cage inside a window, began to sing.

"What were you saying just now about birds, Miss Van?"

I hoped he had not remembered.

"Because," said he, with a touch of irony, "you need n't flatter yourself this bird sings because he feels it. He may have a gamut, and a set of hereditary songs, for all you know."

"Dear me! very likely he has. Is there anything genuine?" said I, thinking it just possible the doctor and I were in very much the same mood, both of us thinking of *Félicité*.

Then we made a final climb into the dark tower, up a narrow way, lighted by slits in the wall. We had to keep tight hold of the railing, and feel every step of

our way. But, ah, the view that burst upon us as we gained the top! We could see the whole extent of Paris on all sides, and the river winding through, and out of sight into the country beyond.

"Well, Miss Vic, say something. Speak your first thought."

"H'm! I don't wonder the Prussians wanted Paris!"

"Now, Miss Van, *your* first thought?"

"I was only thinking how many tangles are smoothed out when we look down from a vast height."

"What, this world's tangles, or the tangles of Paris?"

"Both."

"Right," said he, slowly, as his eye swept the horizon.

Vic was the first who spoke of going down. We touched solid earth once more, took a boat up the Seine, and were met at Auteuil by a boy, who ran screaming to tell Dr. Zélie a man had broken his leg.

Of course we walked the rest of the way alone.

"Aren't there week-days enough for these French people to break their bones in? Have they no regard for the Sabbath?" scolded Vic. "Van, you little deacon, what ails you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you aware that the most striking event of your life has just occurred? Columbus discovered America: *you* have discovered *Félicité*."

"Well, yes, I think so; and is n't she handsome?"

"Handsome! Hear the child! Have you no enthusiasm? No rapture? Is your blood made of

snow-broth? Friendship, alas! 'and is this all remains of thee?'"

Well, it was true I did not feel enthusiastic, only dazzled and dazed. Three weeks ago my heart would have bounded; now it lay in my bosom like lead. I was thinking of Dr. Zelig. I was sure that somehow he was to be pitied; though, if Vic did not think so, I would not put the idea into her head.

Next day came a letter from Félicité; and, when I had fairly begun it, I saw it contained the promised secret. I wished now I had told her not to write it; still I could not help reading the letter.

BLESSED LITTLE EVANGELINE:—

You knew me yesterday; confess it. It is the first time those clear gray eyes of yours have met mine consciously. But why did your eyelids quiver and droop? What were you afraid of, *ma petite*? Of the great broad-shouldered doctor?

Ah, but he would not have been glad of a recognition! Why was it? Indeed, I know not. He is a man hard to comprehend. Evangeline, the time was when I thought I loved him. Listen to the story.

I was a poor girl; for my uncle, my grandfather's heir, was still living. I was pretty and sixteen. Dr. Zelig was awkward and twenty-one. He taught a class in the school I attended. My father liked him because he was a hard student,—still more, I think, because he was an American, — and gave him the *entrée* of our house.

I knew he admired me; but, when my father told me he had asked for my hand, I laughed. "What! that tall Yankee!"

"Attend," said my father, sternly. "I have always declared you should marry a man of sense; and this American pleases me." I looked at my mother; she was silent. My father's word was law, and I was affianced.

Dr. Zelig came often to see me, but always in the presence of one of my parents. I was well enough pleased. I sat by my

mother's side, and answered, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," when I was addressed. The next year I travelled with my uncle, who was an invalid. I returned just as Dr. Zelig was going to America. For two years we have known each other only by letter; but in that time great changes have come to my family — wealth, and a place in the world.

Was I obliged to keep my promise, you will ask? Yes, it was my father's promise; it was not I who could break it. You American girls are rebellious; not so with the French. I was true and obedient, Evangeline; I flirted only a little, as we young girls must. Men dared not ask me of my father, for I was betrothed; they only slipped three-cornered notes into my hand during dances. But my cousin Alphonse Lambert was bolder than the rest, and my mother secretly favored him. My father would hear nothing of it, though Alphonse has an estate with a fine old chateau in Touraine. It belonged to his wife, for Alphonse is a widower.

Ah, well, my Yankee lover came back; and my father said proudly, "I have kept my daughter for you." Now my father is dead; am I bound any longer? Yet I shall marry no one till my year of mourning is expired; then which shall it be? My friend, the American, believes that I love him; but he suspects that my mother is his enemy, and I have often to reassure him. He thinks it is she who sometimes prevents our meeting; and it breaks his heart, for he adores me. It was with M. Lambert that I had gone riding, when he brought you to see me. That he does not know, however. He never met me with Alphonse till yesterday at Notre Dame. Ah, how black his brows grew!

Well, *ma petite*, what can I do? I have not yet determined to throw Dr. Zelig away; Alphonse is a thousand times handsomer, and, between us, a thousand times more to my taste; but how do we know what may happen in a year? Events are decided for us sometimes: we can only wait.

Let me come and talk to you of this, you pale little gray-eyed girl, with the large heart which feels so much for me. Ah, you would serve me if you could; and there may be ways in which you can do it. I count upon your friendship

and may need it. But reveal not a word to your twin-sister.

Write at once, and tell me you are longing to see your own

FRANÇOISE MORAZAIN,
Otherwise Félicité.

The hollow-hearted girl! This, then, explained Dr. Zélie's moodiness. He knew something was wrong; but thought the trouble lay with Félicité's mother! I remembered how he had curled his lip that night, when we walked away from the house after being told Félicité was ill. I had wondered at the time why he did not express some anxiety; but I understood it now only too well. I did not see how he could be so infatuated as to think the daughter of such a mother could be a true woman; but I pitied him with my whole soul, and longed to go and tell him how he was imposed upon.

As for Félicité, slow as I generally am in my decisions, it did not take me long to know what I wanted to say to her.

DEAR MADEMOISELLE:—

I have read your letter, and shall keep my promise never to betray your confidence. But, when you ask for advice, I have none to give. I am a simple little country girl, trained to think right is right and wrong is wrong. I do not know the nice shades which lie between these two. I am ignorant of French morality.

Pray, do not come to see me, mademoiselle; it is an undeserved honor. I have too long intruded on your time by my poor letters; but this will probably be the last.

Very respectfully yours,

VANDELIA ASBURY.

It was cold and curt; but I did not care to alter a word. I went to bed sick at heart; and that was the night when I waked Vic by crying.

I soon recovered my spirits; but at times, and especially when I met Dr. Zelig, I was oppressed by the feeling that I knew something it was n't lawful to know.

I heard no more from Félicité, and everything went on as usual till our little trip to Versailles.

CHAPTER XIII.

VIC'S STORY.

VERSAILLES.

VERSAILLES? Oh, yes, now I remember. It was along in October, I believe. We had been waiting weeks for the Theobolds; but there was no prospect of their ever being at leisure, and they begged us to go without them.

Uncle Paoli had overheard something about it. Deaf people always do overhear what they ought not to, and of course he had "a little feeling." Clum came around to Madame Rey's to see what was best to do about inviting him.

"Don't do it on my account," said I. "If there's anything that hardens me like the rock of Gibraltar it's Uncle Paoli's 'feelings.' I hate feelings!"

"Oh, but the poor old soul!" said Van; "he has n't much to make him happy. Don't you think we could get along with him somehow?"

"Well, Van, if you're determined to be disagreeable, have it your own way. But there's this about it, — if he goes, he's your charge. I call M. Du Souchet to witness that I wash my hands of him."

"Well, Vic, is it settled that I'm to invite him?" asked Clum.

I remember that was the first time he had called me

Vic, and I immediately responded by calling him Clum. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways.

"Yes, Clum, you may invite him."

He went to Uncle Paoli's apartments, and coaxed and entreated ever so long before the dear old gentleman would consent to go. "Oh, no, he was n't wanted;" he "did n't like to put himself round in the way"; and other new and interesting remarks, to the end of the chapter. Which ended in his calling for us girls half an hour before he was due, and hurrying us for dear life to the street-cars.

"See, Van," said I, "what you get by overdoing the cardinal virtues and taking him along."

Aunt Filura's face was as saintly, and her bonnet as totally depraved, as ever. I did n't know what her clothes meant by serving her such tricks, — sliding off, "skewing," or coming to pieces at the most inconvenient times, — and she *such* a good woman!

Uncle Paoli, springing ahead of Clum and the doctor, helped us ladies into the coupé, with rheumatic elegance, and hobbled in after us, remarking that he "knew he was in the way." He certainly was, for a coupé holds only four people; and there were five of us with Henriette. Van said nothing, but quietly stepped out and entered the other part of the car, with Clum and Dr. Zelig. Of course that spoiled my ride, for I'm lost without Van. I concluded that Uncle Paoli was a little wandering in his mind, or he never would have paid extra fare for the sake of going in the coupé.

"How easy!" remarked Aunt Filura, settling back on the cushion.

"Like your own carriage, with a driver and footman and four," said Henriette.

"Yes; but you can take a sight more comfort of it, though, for it don't begin to cost so much," replied Uncle Paoli.

"Why, where's Vandeely? I just this minute missed her. Why, you don't say she's gone into the back end of the car? Well, that's too bad; but I suppose she thought she was one too many — some folks are very quick to see such things!"

He pointed the remark by a glance at me, implying that I was very slow.

A great part of our way lay by the Seine, and through beautiful avenues, with double rows of trees on each side, arching overhead. Aunt Filura gazed out of the window in such an ecstasy that it was as good as the scenery to watch her face — that is, after Henriette had straightened her bonnet.

"That's a pretty river, a real pretty river, ain't it, Filury? I wonder where it disembogues itself?" said Uncle Paoli, waxing poetical.

"It runs *northwest*, and empties into the Atlantic Ocean," replied Aunt Filura, explosively. She had a way of emphasizing every fourth or fifth word when she spoke to Uncle Paoli, so that her sentences went off like a succession of fire-crackers; and, of course, he lost more than half she said.

"Ocean? Oh, yes, Atlantic. I knew well enough if I'd only stopped to think. It's a pretty river, but there's a stiff breeze blowing from it now. Don't you feel it, Filury? But, no," added he, a little reproachfully, "*you* have n't any ailments, so but what you can enjoy yourself."

So the window had to be shut, and we suffocated for the rest of the way.

When we reached Versailles, we spent a little time in the beautiful park, and at twelve entered the palace. The gateway of the palace is lined with statues of some of the celebrated men of Paris; and I was surprised to see that Aunt Filura knew their names, and what they had done to immortalize themselves. She was a great reader, and there was no end to her memory.

It takes an hour and a half to go through the Palace of Versailles without stopping; and as we went very leisurely, it was an afternoon's journey for us. Before long Van turned pale with fatigue, and Dr. Zelig offered her his arm; then Clum offered his to Henriette and me; and Uncle Paoli, not to be outdone in gallantry, escorted Aunt Filura.

"Come, Philander, let's be a-marching," whispered Clum, as we walked behind our mature relatives. There was a peculiar airiness of manner about Uncle Paoli to-day. Occasionally his cane would strike the marble floor with great energy, and we thought he was admiring the pictures, till we happened to overhear this remark, —

"I know, Filury, it's generally considered a disgrace to be an old maid, but I don't think that's fair (pound). If a single woman only knows her place (pound), she ought to be thought just as much of as a married woman (pound). Why not?"

"Hear! hear!" muttered Clum.

Uncle Paoli was doing his best to be polite; but that compliment to old maids set us all off into a perfect gale.

"Aunt Filura," called out Dr. Zelig, "don't get

ahead of us so. Here, I want to show you this little room where Marie Antoinette concealed herself to escape that mob of women."

"Of all things! You don't say so! I've just been reading about that poor creature."

"Yes, yes, let's see. I've forgotten what the matter was. Where did the women come from?" asked Uncle Paoli, reflectively.

"Why, from Paris, Mr. Doggerty, a good ten miles off."

"Oh yes! Maria was the queen that had her hair turn gray. Well, she did have a hard time of it, that's a fact."

"Only fancy a mob of women desperate as wolves!" said Van, straining her eyes as if she could see them through the dust of ages.

"You can't seem to realize it; it ain't the kind of actions you naturally expect of the softer sex," said Uncle Paoli, with a tender glance at Aunt Filura. "For my part, it always goes against my feelings to hear of ladies doing anything unseemly."

"Ladies!" Clum had to turn round suddenly and gaze out of the window. "Ladies" indeed!

"I fancy," said Van, "they looked something like those market-women you showed us the other day, Dr. Zelig, — with hard, coarse faces."

"Yes, Dickens describes that class of people in his 'Tale of Two Cities': 'Knitting, knitting, counting, dropping heads.' Don't you remember?"

"'Two Cities'? Was n't that the book you wanted me to read, 'Zekiel'? I did n't know it was historical, when I said I had n't any time to throw away on Dickens."

"There! you and I agree on that fellow," exclaimed Uncle Paoli, bringing his cane down hard. "I never could see anything in Dickens. *You* could write as well as he does, Filury, if you'd only put your mind to it."

"Why, Mr. Doggerty!"

"Yes, you could. Dickens is a poor stick; and, Filury, you've got an uncommon stock of information, and plenty of good sense to go with it."

Aunt Filura drew away a little.

"Not that I want to see you make a writing-woman of yourself, though. Anything but that!"

"Zekiel," said Aunt Filura, nervously, "I'd like to hear something about these pictures."

"Please, Dr. Zelig," said Van, coming to the rescue, "please take Aunt Filura awhile and describe things to her, and I'll walk with Uncle Paoli."

"Certainly, if you prefer another gentleman's company to mine, Miss Van, what can I do but submit?"

He had been behaving like a dove all the afternoon, but a change came over him presently. A great many visitors were sauntering about the palace, and it was not long before we stumbled upon Félicité. I saw her before Dr. Zelig did, and could n't take my eyes away from the vision. Talk of "alabaster complexion, diamond eyes, and ruby mouth inlaid with pearl," — Clum's old description. It was good as far as it went, but it did n't half describe her. Then her figure, her manners! Why, I'd give all I ever expect to be worth if I could swing and balance myself, or smile, or even pose my head like that exquisite creature!

She was with her mother and the same gentleman

we had seen her with at Notre Dame, and of course Dr. Zelig introduced his party to her party, and everybody went into raptures, as in duty bound. Only I did n't believe the doctor was as ecstatic as he pretended. He squared his magnificent shoulders, and looked like a giant beside the puny, exquisite Frenchman who was with Félicité; but I could n't see anything about him that looked like jealousy. What the trouble was I did n't know, for Félicité was gracious enough surely,—too gracious, considering how coolly Dr. Zelig treated her mother; and as for the mother, she was as benignant as sunbeams.

It was a queer case for Dr. Zelig to be engaged to that beautiful young lady, yet show her so little attention. What right had he to come here to Versailles with us, and not bring her?

But I gave up guessing, and watched Van. She was standing spell-bound, clinging to Uncle Paoli like a sweet-pea to a rickety trellis. I knew she was fairly bewitched with Félicité; it was n't in reason to be otherwise; but she met her advances with great dignity. She was perfectly polite, but there was n't the least ardor in her manner. Félicité was so extremely affectionate and winning that I could n't understand Van's conduct, and longed to give her a good shaking.

"Did you ever see two girls more unlike, in your life, than those two?" asked Clum, as we walked on. "I don't believe your sister could make believe to save her life." It was a pretty broad insinuation that Félicité could and did; but, la me! you would know that by looking at her. She was the perfection of art

and French polish; and how can a person be *thoroughly* polished without learning to make believe? It is part of the process.

Well, Clum had no more to say about his future aunt, but went to talking of the late war, and telling us how this palace had been used as a hospital. I'm not fond of bloody murder, myself, and I was getting very tired. It did n't seem to me my head could contain another idea, and I looked up at the walls lined with magnificent paintings as indifferently as if they had been the rafters of a shed.

"Cheer up!" said Clum. "Who knows but we shall meet somebody from America? I hardly ever came here or to the Louvre without falling in with Yankee acquaintances"

"Now you are saying that just to divert my mind, Columbus Du Souchet, but I won't be diverted," said I; for of course I had no idea that any living soul I had ever seen before was lying in wait for me in the palace of Versailles.

I sauntered along, leaning on Clum's arm and looking at the floor, till he turned me round and said, "See there!" And behold the face of George Washington smiling down upon us."

"And there's the great Daniel Webster," said Uncle Paoli. "Don't it do yer eyes good to see him, Filury?"

"I'd like to shake hands with you, Daniel," said I, flourishing my handkerchief at the portrait, and throwing a kiss. Kisses are not like love: they don't always go where they are sent. This one did n't. A man who had been standing on tiptoe before a high painting, squinting at it through a tin tube, like a sportsman

taking aim, turned round at that very instant, and caught my salute as it was flying through the air.

"Ah, Miss Victoria, I've found you at last!" cried he, rushing up with the greatest eagerness; and behold, it was Mr. Ulmer!

I was surprised out of my manners. "Why, where in the world did you come from?" was all I could stammer out.

Uncle Paoli was as astonished as I; but he had presence of mind enough to greet his nephew with a loud kiss on the mouth. I don't know whether Mr. Ulmer was disconcerted by this or not; he did not seem to be, but spoke to our party, one by one, in his usual graceful, gentlemanly manner. He said he had called at Madame Rey's, and been informed that we were "doing" Versailles; so he thought he would drop in upon us unannounced.

I made a faint attempt at a smile, but I was ready to sink from fatigue, and could n't be glad to see him just yet; it was impossible. What if I had corresponded with him for five months? Folks need n't spring upon folks so unexpectedly; they ought to wait till they get rested.

"Why, Lucius, I had n't the least idea of seeing you till spring," said Uncle Paoli. "Is your throat worse, or what?"

"Yes, sir; that is, it's no better, and I'm advised to coast round on the seas for a few months. My friend Peters is with me."

I thought it was a queer remedy for sore throat, — taking so much salt air; it reminded me of the way Mr. Ulmer used to go out in the evening in winter, with no

scarf round his neck, in order to cure hoarseness. But I don't pretend to understand medicine.

Clum had dropped my arm and drawn back, as if he "did n't mean to be round in the way," and of course I fell to Mr. Ulmer's charge ; it was perfectly natural, but I felt cross.

I had n't thought before what a good time we had all been having, — the Du Souchets, and Theobolds, and Van and I. Now it seemed as if there was a crisis coming. I could n't help making up faces behind my handkerchief as we filed out of the palace, and I gave a groan in my secret soul, and said I to myself, "Lucius Ulmer, I wish you were safely back in America, you and your Uncle Paoli."

CHAPTER XIV.

VAN'S STORY.

MR. ULMER AT PARIS.

I DO not doubt that my sister Victoria *was* annoyed by Mr. Ulmer's coming ; but I'm sure you would n't have thought so if you had seen her talking and laughing with him as we left Versailles.

"Nicely rested, is n't she?" remarked Clum to me. "A minute ago she was ready to drop."

I did n't know what to say. Perhaps Clum was aware that Vic corresponded with Mr. Ulmer, and a correspondence generally implies a particular friendship.

"Oh, now I think of it," said I, "you and Mr. Ulmer were in college together, and of course you knew him very well."

"Well, so-so ; knew something of him the year he was a 'Fresh' ; have n't seen much of him since," replied Clum, with an unmistakable scowl that haunted me a long time, till I suddenly remembered he might have been thinking of some hazing affair, for college boys never forget such things ; but I wished he had said more.

Uncle Paoli insisted that we should none of us take the *coupé*, for it would be a great deal "cuzzier" to ride in the car, all of us together. Mr. Ulmer did not

like this plan, but deferred to his uncle's opinion very politely. I had heard Mr. Daugherty complain that Lucius neglected him, but I must say it never seemed so to me; he always treated him with perfect respect, so far as I could see.

All the way home Mr. Daugherty kept his eyes on Lucius and Vic, as if he were taking observations. Vic was in a hilarious mood, and the more Uncle Paoli stared at her the more she talked to Mr. Ulmer. Poor Uncle Paoli! He sat opposite the two; but they did not address their remarks to him, and his cane kept up a constant patter of impatience.

"Lucius, Lucius, look up here, Lucius! You have n't told me how your mother is."

"Very well, sir, thank you," replied Mr. Ulmer, and went on talking with Vic.

Patter, patter, went the cane again.

"Lucius, look here, Lucius! Seen your Uncle Jack lately?"

"No, sir, not very lately."

"Well, you ought to, Lucius. You should n't have thought of coming to Europe without inquiring about my money. You see, Filury," said Uncle Paoli, turning to her, "this Jack Ulmer is Lucius's uncle. Guess you never knew him; he's a tin-pedler. I sold him a horse more'n a year ago, — a poor horse, but good enough for him. I only asked fifty dollars; but that miserable Jack Ulmer hain't paid me a cent!"

I did pity Mr. Ulmer; for if there was an aristocratic youth alive, it was he. It was too bad to throw his disgraceful relatives at him in this way; still it was funny. Clum had to thrust his head out of the window, and Vic

found something to laugh at, and talked harder than ever. She talked sense and nonsense, discussed pictures, and quoted poetry almost in one breath; and the rest of us were so entertained that we could do nothing but listen. There was a delightful breeze from the river, and she pointed to the sail-boats, repeating for Mr. Ulmer some lines we had just been reading, —

“ A rapture pouring up the tide,
A freshness through the heat, — a sweet,
Uncertain sound, like fairy feet.”

There she stopped; but Mr. Ulmer finished it in a low voice, —

“ The west wind blows my love to me.”

Vic blushed and laughed rather consciously. It was an unfortunate verse to quote just then; but Uncle Paoli made a diversion by asking “ whether or no Uncle Jack could n’t pay some of that note in dried apples.”

When we reached Paris we dined at a coffee-house, one of the largest in the city. Everything was on such a grand scale, and there was such a constant outpouring of coffee, that Vic turned to Mr. Ulmer, and asked with intense solemnity, “ What *do* they boil it in? And don’t you suppose they have to settle it with whale-skin?”

Entering the street again, we caught a glimpse of a *fiacre* and two bay ponies, and had a bow from Félicité. She was dressed in the deepest mourning. Now, I dislike mourning. It is one of my set ideas, and I can’t be reasoned out of it, that mourning is a relic of barbarism. I have made Vic promise never to wear it for

me if I die first. But Félicité's black garments! It was impossible to find the least fault with them; she illumined them as the sun illumines a cloud, dispelling all idea of gloom.

Indeed, as Henriette said, "Her toilette was ravishing." I think she was the loveliest creature I ever beheld; but when I am really angry, beauty counts for nothing with me. I have n't the artistic eye, like Vic, and I merely looked at Félicité with the eyes of my soul, and found her hateful. What right had she to make Dr. Zelie unhappy? She was a wicked, unprincipled woman, and I was ashamed of having loved her. She had said to me at Versailles, "How could you write me that cold letter, Evangeline? It broke my heart."

She did not seem heart-broken in the least. She and her mother both overwhelmed me with compliments; but I had learned a lesson, and knew just how much their fine words were worth. I did not mean to have anything more to do with Félicité.

"Miss Vic, I shall be round in the morning to see you — and your sister," said Mr. Ulmer at parting.

"I suppose you never thought of doubting that," muttered Clum to me with more ill-humor than I ever knew him to show before. Did he really dislike the man, or what did he mean?

As soon as we were fairly in our room, Vic tossed her wraps on the floor, flung herself on the bed and began to cry. "What 'spose sent Lucius Ulmer to Paris? Wish he had n't come! Wish he'd been shipwrecked! Wish his Uncle Jack had kept him at home to sell dried apples!"

"Why, Vic, I began to think you liked him."

"Well, I do a little, and a great deal I don't."

"But you give him reason to think you do."

"Reason, reason! Don't always be harping on that! Haven't I told you I will have my careless season, spite of melancholy reason?"

"I don't think you've had a very careless season, corresponding with Mr. Ulmer."

"Well no, not exactly; but 't was easier to keep on writing than it was to stop."

"Well, Vic, I don't mean to preach; but if you weren't glad to see Mr. Ulmer, what made you so sociable?"

My thoughts were on Félicité and Dr. Zelie; and I suppose I felt a little severe against flirting on general principles.

"What made me so sociable? Why, it was as solemn as a funeral procession, and somebody had to be lively. You throw all the responsibility of being agreeable on me, Van, you know you do, and then you turn round and scold me for talking."

It was true, and I could n't deny it.

"Did n't Uncle Paoli stare? I declare," cried Vic, springing off the bed, "I'll lead him a dance before I'm done with it!"

"Uncle Paoli?"

"Yes; and Lucius and Aunt Marian. She'll hear of this by return mail, — how that 'headstrong girl' has been trifling with Mr. Ulmer. Don't I wish I could see her pucker her saintly lips!"

Vic was dancing pirouettes and rigadoons by that time, at such a rate that the English lord's daughter,

who roomed next door with her governess, pounded on the wall to know what was the matter. The lord's daughter was very fond of Vic.

"And Clum! Oh, 't was fun to see the black looks Clum put on at that coffee-house!"

"You vain thing! As if Clum cares for you!"

"Cares? Pshaw, I don't mean the serious kind of caring. But I've been too affable to Clum. I'll show him he is n't all the man in the world."

"He knew that before, by the way you smiled on Mr. Theobold."

"Oh, I forgot that musical creature. So nervous Mr. Theobold is! Why, he almost flies into strings whenever I talk to Clum, and what *will* he do when he sees Mr. Ulmer? Van, you don't appreciate it," said she, laughing in high glee.

I don't think I did. I knew Vic meant no harm, and I had no doubt it was a great joke; but I could n't see the least fun in setting people by the ears so. It was because I was such a little Quaker, and I really felt ashamed of myself for it; so I picked up our things and put them away without saying any more.

Next morning I had a lovely bouquet from Félicité, with a note, begging to be allowed to come and take me to ride after dinner.

"Of course you'll go," said Vic.

"Of course I won't," said I; but I must say I was sorely tempted. That *fiacre* and those two bay ponies!

Vic couldn't understand it; and I had to explain that I did n't approve of Félicité, and what was more I did n't intend to listen to any further confidences from that young lady.

"I never saw such a set little thing in my life!" said Vic.

Just as I had finished my note of regrets Mr. Ulmer called, and Vic made me go down with her. It is n't very exhilarating to sit and stare at the furniture of a grand parlor while two other people are talking; but I had to do it day after day, for Mr. Ulmer made himself very neighborly, though after the first call we never let him come in study-hours.

He had a wonderful flow of language, and sometimes as I watched the words dropping from his lips, so evenly, so continuously, my eyelids drew together, and I almost went to sleep in my chair.

He stayed in Paris, and kept staying, and he and Mr. Peters took us to see all the local lions; and every evening when we were not somewhere else we were at the Du Souchets'; but wherever we went, Mr. Ulmer was with us; "Mr. Ubiquitous," Vic dubbed him, or "Old Probabilities," from a fashion he had of saying "probably." To hear him talk you would have thought he knew much more about the city than Dr. Zelie or Clum; and I did not wonder they thought him a little conceited, for he remarked once, rather patronizingly, that M. Du Souchet had "a fine French accent," which amused Clum very much, considering that he was born in Paris. Still there certainly was an air of distinction about Mr. Ulmer; people made way for him on the street. Vic evidently liked to be seen with him, and they looked remarkably well together.

It was a gay season; but I did wonder if we were doing just right, and did wish Vic had mother or Helen to advise her. I had to study very hard to make

up for the hours we lost in sight-seeing ; and Vic neglected her music. She thought that was just as well, she said, for was n't she singing and playing every day with Mr. Theobold?

Clum seemed quite exercised by the prolonged stay of Messrs. Ulmer and Peters. "Wonder when those fellows are going to start on their trip?" said he to me. "It looks a little as if they were '*petering out*.'"

CHAPTER XV.

VIC'S STORY.

CHARADE PARTY.

"A young man looking for a wife,"
Was some one's sly reminder;
"And he may look for all of me,"
I said, "and never find her."

NO, indeed! But Mr. Peters had never seen Paris before, and did n't intend to be in a hurry; and of course Mr. Ulmer was n't going to tear himself away from his Uncle Paoli for the sake of travelling alone!

It was "Lucius! Lucius!" from morning till night; and if the dear old gentleman did n't know Lucius's whereabouts every blessed minute, there was trouble. He could n't take us to ride, but Uncle Paoli contrived to hear of it, and hint in a roundabout way that young men nowadays were very extravagant.

You can ride in fine style in Paris for two or three francs—say fifty cents—an hour; but Uncle Paoli wished it distinctly understood that every sou Lucius spent made a hole in his purse. *He* had educated him, he was supplying him with money,—all he did n't get by writing for the newspapers; and at his death Lucius would be his heir, that is, if "Grandpa Grummidge"

didn't die in the poorhouse: he was always threatening it. And in return for all this, it *was* a pity if he couldn't snub Lucius and make him uncomfortable. Wasn't he all the nephew he had in the world, the only son of his only sister "Soffy"?

If Mr. Ulmer and Mr. Peters took us to the opera, Mr. Daugherty was horrified, and asked Lucius if he had forgotten his mother belonged to the church. As for Uncle Paoli himself, I had known him to attend an opera; but then he seemed to think he had been converted once for all, beyond any possibility of backsliding, and of course it did n't hurt *him*.

All this while, though he watched us with a vigilance worthy of Aunt Marian Hinsdale, I could n't see that he was at all worried about the state of Lucius's heart. He seemed quite willing the boy should spend his time with us, if he would only tell exactly where we went and how much money was spent. I was disappointed, for I had made up my mind to be picked upon without mercy. There was a good reason for Uncle Paoli's forbearance, as I found out in due time.

I remember one Thursday Henriette gave us a gentle hint that we might as well dress in our best when we came to tea that night, as a certain Russian gentleman was to be present (a prince, I believe; Russians are generally princes) who had expressed a particular desire to see Miss Victoria act in charades.

"Are you going to have Mr. Peters and Mr. Ulmer?" asked Van.

"No; Clum thought there would be plenty of others without them."

I was rather glad of it. I thought I should like one

evening without Mr. Ulmer, just to see how it would seem. I dropped an hour from my practising, and went to furbishing up my gray silk. Van and I dressed alike in the main, but I wore more furbelows and streamers; they seemed to suit my style. And that fall I had had my ears pierced, and bought a set of rose-colored coral, — oh! were n't they lovely? — carved roses and rose-leaves, and only cost fifteen dollars. Van looked long-faced.

"If you'd only wait till we earn some money," said she.

"Wait?" said I. "By that time my cheeks will be faded out to a white, white rose, and these corals won't match 'em. No, I'm going to have my good times as I go along."

Van did n't say any more, — only ran her finger down the list in our account-book, and drew a deep sigh, "fetched a long scythe," as somebody in Quinebasset remarks. I knew those accounts had swelled up fearfully; and they were mostly mine, for Van had n't bought much of anything but a tin dipper, a few lumps of sugar, and perhaps a pocket-handkerchief. We scorned the idea of keeping two purses; we had all things in common, and by and by, when we earned money, we were to pay our debts together. If you think my conscience did n't prick me once in a while when Van fingered that account-book, you're mistaken; but I was n't going to own it to her.

"It would be an awful thing for you to have earrings, my dove, for you don't like 'em; but why you should be so dreadfully afraid of using your own brother-in-law's money is more than I can tell. Did n't

he marry your sister Helen and take her away from her friends? And does n't he owe us a living for that? And did n't his grandfather die as rich as Croesus? And how on earth is Morris to get rid of his gold if somebody does n't help him spend it? Look up here now, and see if I don't look pretty."

Van owned that the corals were very becoming. It was rather too bad that she had n't even a fresh ribbon to put on; but I gave her one of mine that I had worn twice, and she was perfectly satisfied.

"If you'll please tie it for me, Vic."

The artistic sense was utterly wanting in Van, and that was one reason why she did n't care more for pretty clothes. I will insist upon it, it was n't a clear case of conscience.

Just as we were ready, and I was in a hurry to go before "Lucius Ubiquitous" should call, a card was sent up from Félicité to Van. She did persecute that poor child, having no idea, I suppose, that she could be unwelcome. Van began to write something on the back of the card.

"What," said I, "are n't you going down?"

"No, I can plead an engagement."

"Why, Van, what will Dr. Zelig think if you behave in this way? Don't you care for his friendship?"

Van's pen wavered a moment. I remember just how she looked, with her big eyes in a fine frenzy rolling.

"Yes, I suppose he *will* turn against me. I'm sorry, for I like Dr. Zelig; but right is right," said she; and sent down the card by the servant who was waiting.

I never could have done it, for Félicité was a woman of high standing, and her preference was very flatter-

ing. I thought Van had made a sure thing of it that time, and killed her dead ; but bless you ! no ; she had as many lives as a cat.

We got away from Madame Rey's just in time ; for we had scarcely gone ten rods before we saw Mr Ulmer across the street, touching his hat to us and bowing like a weeping willow.

" We can't break our engagement to the Du Souchets, remember," whispered Van triumphantly, as he came over.

No, but Mr. Ulmer could go with us, you know. Oh, certainly ! And once there he went in to pay his compliments to Miss Wix, for whom he had conceived a sudden respect.

" We'd be pleased to have you take tea with us, sir," said she, in her old-fashioned, hearty way, for her hospitality was unbounded ; and after a polite protest he accepted the invitation. I wondered at him, when he knew there were other guests especially invited ; but men are funny about such things, — never afraid of intruding, or that there won't be cake enough to go round.

When Clum came in presently, with Mr. Theobald and the Russian gentleman, I fancied he looked annoyed at seeing Mr. Ulmer, but he greeted him with sufficient politeness, and I concluded I must have been mistaken. I suppose I should n't have noticed his manner any way, if it had n't struck me at Versailles that he treated Mr. Ulmer rather coldly, and if little Etienne had n't found an old photograph of his tucked out of sight behind one of Clum's picture-frames, as if Clum did n't consider it worth putting in his album. Well, if they had ever quarrelled, it was no affair of mine.

My hair was arranged in a new style, which I had just learned from one of our girls, and Henriette was dying to know how I did it. It was the first time I had appeared in the coral jewelry, and altogether I was prepared to make a little sensation. But the Russian gentleman turned out to be one of your poky, scientific people, and I don't believe he knew whether I was dressed in silk or sackcloth. He talked to me for a while after supper, but I couldn't understand his French or he mine. He wanted to learn the whole United States in one lesson; asked the height of mountains, length of rivers, and things like that, which I never had had the least curiosity about. Geography is n't my strong point. After a while Dr. Zelig went and brought Van out of the corner where she was pacifying Uncle Paoli, and brought her along to us. I could see she did n't want to come, but in a few minutes Dr. Zelig succeeded in getting her attention, and she began to be very much interested. The Russian — I can't spell his name, and shan't try — had a great deal to tell about some mastodon bones and other old horrors that had been found in Siberia, and Van thought it was perfectly delightful. Her soul waked up and glowed through her whole face, particularly her eyes, and when she looks like that she needs no adornment; I don't think even ear-rings would improve her.

I fell to talking with Mr. Ulmer, or rather he fell to haranguing at me, and Mr. Theobald sat on the piano-stool and turned over music like a hurricane. I was relieved when the time came for charades. Our Russian guest was perfectly absorbed with Dr. Zelig and Van; but he knew he should enjoy the acting, he said, with a

low bow to me. I did n't feel in the spirit of it, somehow, but I had to take the lead.

We were to divide ourselves into two sections, and Clum was to be captain of one section and I of the other. Clum gave me the first choice, and I chose Van. She looked surprised.

"Oh, please don't!" said she. "I shall spoil it." But I waved her off into the little saloon, and she went reluctantly.

"Vandelia is too straightforward to be much of an actor," remarked Dr. Zelie, as she passed out of hearing.

"I only want her for a tableau," said I.

"It is the sweetest face I ever saw in my life," murmured the Russian in very poor French; and Dr. Zelie nodded and smiled.

I wondered what Van would have thought of that. It gratified me to hear it; still I did feel rather cast in the shade.

I did n't mean to have Mr. Ulmer, he was too conceited to obey orders; but as Clum passed him by I had to take him. I don't think our charades went off very well that evening; they turned out, like the cream biscuits mother used to make for company, not half as good as usual. But I remember one charade in three syllables, and you may guess it if you like.

I conducted my forces into the little saloon that opened from the parlor, leaving Clum and his division to be entertained as spectators. After a while the saloon-door opened, and Clarice, my door-keeper, announced the first syllable of the word. The spectators all rushed forward to see better; and there sat the old woman who lived in a shoe. It was your humble servant, with

Aunt Filura's stiffest cap on, surrounded by a host of refractory children, who had to be beaten and fed by turns with a long-handled spoon. Clum thought the shoe was pretty creditable, considering I had never learned the trade. It consisted of black shawls and water-proofs, kept in shape by a judicious internal application of foot-stools and dictionaries. I was quite at home in it, and should have played the overburdened mother very well, if Etienne, my youngest, had n't bitten his tongue, and howled so fearfully that I lost my presence of mind and pushed him against the toe of our domicil, when the whole thing caved in with a crash. A shout ensued ; and so ended the first scene.

"Shoe latchet !" exclaimed Uncle Paoli, thumping his cane.

But he changed his mind at the second syllable ; it certainly could not be latch, whatever it was. I appeared as a country school-mistress, with a pencil behind my ear, and my pupils in a line in front of me. I was making the most frantic exertions to teach them the alphabet, and they were none of them chickens, Etienne being the youngest ; but such was their profound stupidity that I could n't get them beyond the first letter.

The last syllable was a tableau, and positively beautiful, representing a pilgrim worshipping at the shrine of a saint. Dr. Zelig was the pilgrim, and it might have been anybody, for the lights were so arranged that they left him in deep shadow, and shone full upon the picture of the saint. The picture was Van. What other girl could have knelt behind a big gilt frame, and not have looked as if she were cleaning a window ?

I knew Van would be angelic in white muslin curtain drapery, with her hands clasped and her eyes raised. The house was so still you could hear a pin drop.

"By Jove! you hit it that time, Vic," whispered Clum. Then everybody clapped.

But as the applause died away, what did I overhear but this remark from Uncle Paoli, who usually does as he would be done by, and speaks very loud: "Ain't she *saintish*, Mr. Theobold? I'm perfectly willing Lucius should take a shine to *her*. They went to the concert together last night, did n't they?"

"No, sir, he went with her sister."

"Hey? What? That highflyer of a Victory? Why, I'm sure I thought it was Vandeely. Well, well! if *that's* the game, he's got a soft spot on his head, and it's considerable big over."

I suppose everybody laughed. I don't see how they could have helped it; but there was n't any need of Mr. Ulmer's trying to soothe my feelings by saying, in a soft whisper, —

"I don't see with Uncle Paoli's eyes, remember."

That made me angry. As if *I* cared what eyes Lucius Ulmer saw with!

I made up my mind I would not speak to him again that evening, or to his precious uncle either.

The last scene: Growlings, and subdued roars heard from the little saloon; then the door opened, and Etienne came out ringing a bell, followed by his Uncle Zeke, who announced that by paying the paltry sum of a franc one and all of us could witness the most wonderful collection of animals ever exhibited in the Eastern Hemisphere.

"Caravan! Caravan!" called Clum and Henriette in a breath.

"But the third syllable was 'saint,' was n't it?" said Mr. Theobold, coming over to me. "I don't quite understand."

"It was 'Van,' don't you see?"

"Ah, yes; but how about the *shoe*?"

"Oh, that represented Care," said I; and turning away from Mr. Ulmer, as if I did not notice him, I devoted myself to Mr. Theobold to atone for past neglect. He was a modest, well-bred young man, and as sensitive as a girl.

Well, it was n't a very charming time, and I never heard that the Russian prince was particularly struck with my acting; but it happened that that was the last evening I spent in Mr. Ulmer's society for some time. He and Mr. Peters were at last ready to "coast round on the seas"; after which they had other plans, they did n't deign to say what. "I'll write pretty often," said Mr. Ulmer, thinking that would take the sharp edge off the parting, perhaps.

"Oh, don't! 't is n't worth while." I hoped he would see I wanted to break off the correspondence. Not he!

"Ah! but I enjoy writing," he blandly replied.

I said something more about its spoiling a good time to scratch it down in a note-book, and then put it in a letter; I'd as lief wait and hear his adventures after he got back, etc. etc.,—said all I decently could; but that obtuse creature insisted upon it he'd a good deal rather write than not!

I was completely discouraged. Van says I have a way of talking as if I were only half in earnest, and

that is why I have always got into so much trouble. I wonder if that is true?

"Well, Mr. Ulmer," said I, catching at the last straw of hope, "I can't answer your letters, you know, for you'll be on the seas where you can't get them." He knocked that straw out of my fingers in a minute.

Certainly he could get letters,—not the least trouble about that. He was going to stop at such and such places along the coast, and should give me his address each time, never fear.

"But I won't ask you to write as often as I do," said he, taking my hand for the last good-by,—the last of half a dozen, as nearly as I can remember. "I'll count one of your letters worth three of mine, we'll say."

"Three times naught is naught," said I to Van, the moment he was gone. "I shan't write him at all, that's the amount of it."

"Oh! I do hope you'll stick to that," said she, kissing me

Well, I did think I should.

"And now, Vic, let's go to studying like good girls. Here we are, eighteen years old, idling away our time like a couple of children. It is n't what life was made for, now is it?"

I was glad she had the grace to say "we." It looked well in Van, when she never wasted a minute except to please me.

CHAPTER XVI.

VAN'S STORY.

GOING TO LYONS.

“COME here and kiss me, Vandeely! There, that’s a good girl! And now I want you to read me this letter from Lucius. He has had a good liberal education, but he writes as bad a hand as a lawyer.”

“So you have got back to your old corner, Miss Van,” said Dr. Zelig, who was pacing the room rather restlessly. Clum and Vic were at the piano, and Uncle Paoli and I were sitting before the grate, for it was late in November, and we began to have fires. I never shall forget those tiny brass andirons, which Aunt Filura rubbed every morning with oxalic acid, followed by polishing powder, feeling not at all afraid of her hands, — neither afraid nor ashamed. They were large, shapely, serviceable hands, but usually rough and often discolored, for she could not keep them long at a time out of her “chemical experiments.” She never trusted Julie to polish the brasses or wash the hearth. She did most of the drudgery herself, I think, leaving only the cooking to Julie, who was far from strong.

“How clean Filury keeps this hearth!” Uncle Paoli said to me admiringly. I hope he enjoyed it as much as I did. I remember just how the network of the fender was reflected upon the purplish-gray stone, and

•how I looked into the fire that evening, after reading Mr. Ulmer's last appeal for money, and thought of Félicité. I was always looking into the fire, but had never noticed the shadow of that network before. "It is just such a shadow as Félicité casts over Dr. Zelig," thought I, "full of little loop-holes and hazy uncertainties. I wish it was a decided, unmistakable blackness, so he'd have no chance for hope; but that would n't be like Félicité: she will torment him very prettily, and then perhaps fly off and marry Alphonse."

My mind was full of this, for I had just had another letter from Félicité, begging me to see Dr. Zelig and find out what state of mind he was in. He had not called on her half a dozen times since she met him at Versailles, ever so many weeks ago. Was he jealous of Alphonse? Impossible! Evangeline must be so good as to talk with him and soothe his feelings. He had the highest opinion of Evangeline; he would listen to her. She must tell him not to harbor a moment's jealousy of Alphonse, who was merely her cousin, her good friend, etc. etc. She was "desolated" to think Dr. Zelig should be unhappy! Everywhere she heard of him as working very hard. Who knew but he might yet win the bit of red ribbon from the Medical School to wear in his button-hole?

The gist of the whole matter lay in that last sentence. If he was going to rise in the world, she would marry him; otherwise not. It did not need very sharp eyes to see through Félicité since she had begun to grow confidential.

But the idea that I would be willing to approach Dr. Zelig on such a subject as this! Did she think, because

I had shown a little sympathy for her, I was going to take care of her love affairs and tell lies for her? Because I had no airs and graces, and was n't a woman of the world, did she take me for a simpleton? Yes, and thought she could make a cat's-paw of me. That was what she had been scheming for all the time; but I was determined to let her see she was mistaken in her cat. I gave her a very short, decided answer, and made up my mind that if she wrote me another letter I should send it back unanswered.

"Vandeely," said Uncle Paoli, "you're a great hand to sit and think. I wish you'd put that cat down out of your lap, and go get the backgammon board. I'd like a game of chess, and there don't seem to be anybody to play with me, without it's you."

"Oh! I don't know even the moves."

"Well, I guess you can learn, can't you?" said he, taking his chess-men out of his pocket. Vic called them his "minute-men," — always on hand, though seldom in actual service.

"Vandelia," said Dr. Zelig, stopping short before us, "don't you do it. If you once learn, he'll give you no peace of your life."

But by that time Uncle Paoli's fingers were moving so delightedly over the red and white ivories that I could not refuse him. I did not know what I was undertaking. I am slow to learn, and my teacher soon lost patience.

"The knight moves in a half-circle: what do you go *obleekly* for? Why, Vandeely, seems to me you're a little *dumb*, ain't ye?"

"Don't submit to this, Vandelia," said Dr. Zelig,

coming up to us again. Then louder, — “Mr. Dougherty, if a young lady consents to play with either of us, we ought to feel highly honored: don’t you think so?”

“Certainly, sir, oh, certainly,” replied Uncle Paoli, cowering. “She kind o’ mixes up the pieces; but then it ain’t to be expected she’ll get it through her head in a minute.”

Dr. Zelig drew up a chair, and made a few explanations slowly and clearly, not hurrying me from one thing to another jerkily, like Uncle Paoli. I had begun to think myself an idiot, but in a very short time was delighted to find I had really learned the rules of the game.

Dr. Zelig went up to his study. More than two hours passed, and when he returned Uncle Paoli and I were still playing, and Uncle Paoli scolding in a high key.

“Mr. Dougherty!” said Dr. Zelig, with a blaze in his eye that made the poor old soul curl like a bit of birch-bark on a fire.

“I did n’t mean any harm,” he mumbled.

“No, Dr. Zelig, he did n’t,” said I, quite ashamed to have such a fuss made about me. “I don’t mind little things he says, for I *am* stupid and I know it.”

The blaze slowly died out of Dr. Zelig’s eyes, and he turned and spoke in the gentlest manner to Mr. Dougherty.

“Vandelia,” said he, dropping his voice, “how poor are they that have not patience! Don’t you think I’m the crossdest man you ever saw in your life?”

I thought his affairs with Félicité were enough to make anybody cross; but of course I could not say what I thought, or even show by my looks that I pitied

him. I felt like a hypocrite, knowing so much more than he dreamed of my knowing.

"You've never been cross to *me*," I said at last, without raising my eyes.

"That's begging the question, Vandelia."

Uncle Paoli had gathered up his chess-men, with a hurt look, and was pocketing them along with the sharp word Dr. Zelig had spoken. He always pocketed his injuries, poor man, and brooded over them; but they were sure to come up again, — and so were the chess-men.

"I'm cross to-night on principle," continued Dr. Zelig. "You've no right to tax your brain like this, after studying hard all day. When you come here you may play with the kitten; but if you attempt another game of chess with Uncle Paoli, you do it against my protest."

"Vandelia does look pale," said Aunt Filura, glancing up from her book and her knitting. "Do feel her pulse, 'Zekiel, and see if she needs iron."

"I'd rather ask her a question, Aunt Filura, than to feel her pulse. Will you tell me honestly, Vandelia, have you the least idea of trying for a diploma at the Hôtel de Ville?"

"Why, Dr. Zelig, how *did* you ever hear of that?"

"Only guessed it by your overworking so. Well, well! you'll need quieting-powders more than iron, if that is in your head."

"Oh, but it is n't in my head, not really, Dr. Zelig. I know it's a great undertaking."

"No, you don't half know."

"Oh dear! if it's worse than I've heard, it must be

awful; but Vic and I have been thinking if we only *could* pass it, what a splendid help it would be to us as teachers."

"Yes, if you should live to teach."

"But Henriette is going to pass."

"Possibly. She is a French girl."

"Oh! I see, doctor, you think it preposterous."

"Well, it looks like it. But you see I don't know how learned you may be. Are you willing sometime to let me ask you a few questions in your studies, Miss Van, — such questions as I know you would have to answer at Hôtel de Ville?"

"Oh, if you only would!"

Vic shot a glance at me that brought me to my senses. I had not stopped to think how afraid I was of Dr. Zelig's sharp eyes; but now I did think of them I was frightened. For a young man he seemed so very learned! A long time passed, however, and he appeared to have forgotten Hôtel de Ville. He was very busy and unusually absent-minded, — tormented by Félicité, perhaps. It was too bad: she was not worth his suffering for. If he only knew what I knew he would banish her from his mind at once, — or this was what I thought, "the little girl that knew not love."

I never saw Dr. Zelig without trying to guess, by his manner, how things were going on. I did not mean to watch him, but I suppose I unconsciously did, for I was often meeting his eye and feeling convicted. It was no affair of mine, so why should I be forever worrying about it? It was enough for me to attend to my sister Vic.

I began to think I was a meddling character, for

often, when we started to go to bed, Vic said meekly, "It is curtain-lecture time, Van. Please hold forth while I'm taking down my hair."

She said I was always low in my mind for fear she should smile too much on Clum, or he should smile too much on her, or there should be an extra glance thrown at Mr. Theobald. "We must be kind to our fellow-creatures, haven't you been taught that?" said she. "And if they happen to be eligible young men, born in a Christian land, that won't excuse us: we must be kind to 'em, just the same as if they were heathens."

I thought she carried it too far when she was so "kind" as to answer Mr. Ulmer's fourth letter, though I knew it was done to tease Uncle Paoli, who was always asking leading questions and worrying for fear there would be a correspondence. She directed a letter to Mr. Ulmer, and "accidentally" left it where Uncle Paoli could see it. "So much for his calling me a highflyer!" said she, with a toss of her head.

By this time winter had set in. The weather was raw and chilly, not like the clear, frosty air of Quinnebasset, and fires cost so much that we could not always afford to keep warm. But then Paris was so beautiful!

"Heaven pities Winter,
And wraps him, angel white, in spotless snow,"

And snow and marble together make a shining city, fit for the gods. It was a delicious season for Vic and me. The novelty had n't worn off, and we never knew what was coming next: that is the beauty of being in a foreign land. All this while we were having weekly letters from home and semi-weekly letters from Helen.

Our friends were all well, and there was nothing to fret about; but by and by I fancied Helen was growing low-spirited; we both fancied so.

"She is homesick, as true as you live," said Vic. "And married too!"

Still, we did not think much about it, and scarcely believed it was so.

One morning I was doing my hair, and Vic sitting on the bed, having a "religious fit," and reading the Bible, when a card was brought up from Dr. Zelig. It was an unusual hour for him; indeed, he seldom came at all. When we went down he met us with a pleasant smile, but it was so evidently forced that I thought at once something had happened.

"Helen is sick," said I, my mind going back to her sad letters. I was right. He had just received a telegram from Morris, saying Helen was ill of a fever in Lyons, and would he come immediately and bring Van?

"Lyons! Why, how came Helen and Morris at Lyons?"

Vic began to scream and clutch Dr. Zelig's arm. "Oh dear! it's a Roman fever, and I know that's the worst in the world."

"Then you know more than I do," said Dr. Zelig, taking out his watch. "In the first place, it may not be what we call a Roman fever; and in the next place, if it is, it may be a very mild case. Vandelia, can you be ready to start at one o'clock?"

"Vandelia, Dr. Zelig? Do you suppose I'm not going too?" cried Vic, frantically. "Don't I love my sister Helen as well as Van does?" And she flew round the room like mad. I saw hysterics approach-

ing, and wondered what I ought to say or do ; but Dr. Zelig was equal to the occasion. He put his arm around her shoulders and walked with her, talking as coolly as if he were discussing the weather.

"Why did n't Morris send for me, too, for me, *too*? But I *will* go!" she cried.

"One will be enough ; that is, as I am going," said Dr. Zelig. "The sight of both of you might be too much for Mrs. Lynde. Vandelia, have you got a valise?"

"Then Morris ought to have sent for me instead of Van! Why, I'm a perfect Samson, and everybody knows Van has n't strength enough to lift a pound of tea!"

"Well, she is n't expected to lift any tea, so that is fortunate. Perhaps your brother only wants her to go and look at his wife, and you know, Victoria, you could n't look at her without talking. It is a charming trait of yours, this gift of conversation ; but it is n't always good for the sick-room."

Vic was still laughing and crying, but much calmer, by the time Dr. Zelig left ; and while I was packing, and she helping quite reasonably, there was a bustle in the passage, and in walked Aunt Filura, literally on the flat of her foot, for she never wore heels. "Now I'll tell you what I think," said she, plucking at her veil, which she had pinned under her shawl, as usual, "I think I'm the one to go to Helen. You ain't either of you fit ; and 'Zekiel thinks so, too. He says he hates to see Vandelia start off with that white face."

"Oh, but Aunt Filura," said I, "nothing ever ails me but headache. Don't worry about me. You're ever so kind, but I would n't let you go on any account."

Dear Aunt Filura pleaded for some time ; but when I assured her Morris would certainly have a nurse on the spot before this, and would want nothing of me in the way of service, she yielded. But Vic must go home with her and stay, she said ; 'Zekiel had been the one to propose it, and of course 'Zekiel must be obeyed. It was so kind and thoughtful of them both ! Vic felt forlorn enough at being left, but she could bear it better at the Du Souchets' than at Madame Rey's.

It was a strange ride to Lyons, that afternoon. At any other time I should have enjoyed the novelty of the landscape, — everywhere hedges instead of fences, everywhere cottages with tiled roofs ; but now my heart was so heavy that I scarcely observed anything. Yes, I observed one thing, — Dr. Zelig's serenity of manner. A great change had come over him within a week ; it had come suddenly, too, and I had never been able to understand it, for Félicité had at last ceased writing to me, and I had lost what little clew I ever possessed to that unhappy affair. But I could not be mistaken as to the change in Dr. Zelig ; every member of the family remarked it, even little Etienne.

I did not feel like talking, and for the first few miles nothing was said, except that Dr. Zelig begged me to lie down and go to sleep, with his overcoat for a pillow. I knew it would be of no use. I am known as a "sleepy-head," but I cannot sleep any better than other people when my mind is anxious.

"Well, what is it?" said he at last, after I knew he had been watching me for some time. "You are in a mizmaze."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you wink so fast. When you puzzle your head, your eyelids always twitch. It would be a good thing for you, Vandelia, if you would n't think so much. That's a bit of professional advice, and I *give* it to you."

"Thank you. But if you want to know what I'm thinking about just now, it's malaria."

"A delightful theme for contemplation."

"Oh well, you must have wondered about it yourself, Dr. Zelig, why malaria and fevers, and all these horrid things are allowed. It does seem strange, when God could have prevented it as well as not."

"How do you know He could have prevented it? If you're going to cavil, do cavil reasonably, now won't you?" said Dr. Zelig, moving into the opposite seat, and looking at me with eyes half laughing, half serious.

"I wish you'd help me," said I. "It is dreadful to have hard thoughts of God. Oh, it is dreadful!"

"Well, perhaps I *can* help you a little." He looked serious now. "First, tell me, Vandelia, what sort of a world is this we live in? Is it vital or mechanical?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is it living and growing, or is it wound up and set going like a watch?"

"Oh! it is vital, it is growing."

"Well, it grows by laws?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, now, does water run up hill or down?"

"Down, of course. Why, what a question!"

"Not so fast. What makes it run down hill?"

"Attraction of gravitation."

"And when it has found its level, what does it do?"

"Why, it stops; and sometimes there are little stagnant pools left. Is that what you mean? Is that the cause of malaria?"

"Not exactly. The lowest forms of plants come to live in these pools; there's the trouble. Every tiniest germ of vegetable life will grow wherever it can find a foothold; that's one of the laws, *Vandelia*."

"Yes, I know it."

"And isn't it a beautiful law? Isn't it wonderful and admirable?"

"Oh, yes."

"And could it be changed without upsetting the whole universe? Think a minute."

I thought, and answered, "No, I did n't believe it was possible."

I can't tell you how much good that little talk did me. Of course I had a dim faith all along that God was right, but it was unspeakably sweet to have his ways justified by science and reason. After a while I looked up all serene, and there sat the doctor scowling.

"Dr. Zelig," said I, plucking up a little courage, "it is you that are in a mizmaze now. I think you have more mizmazes than I do."

"Well, I shall have to own it," said he, laughing; "but mine are not so audacious as yours. I was only thinking what fools men are, that they don't know enough to drain the land and stop malaria."

That was just like Dr. Zelig. He had the least patience with ignorance of any man I ever saw.

When we reached Lyons, Morris was there with a carriage to meet us. His face was drawn and white;

but before a word was spoken he took me into his arms and kissed me.

"I cannot say whether Helen is better or worse; that is what I want Dr. Zelig to tell us," said he, as we drove to the hotel.

She was asleep. There were dark rings under her eyes and purple stains in her cheeks. A nurse, in the dress of the Sisters of Charity, was sitting beside her, dropping medicine into a teaspoon. Dr. Zelig approached the bed softly, and stood looking at Helen. What would Morris and I have given if we could have read his thoughts? The dear girl stirred a little, and we stole quietly out of the room. It seemed as if I could not wait for her to wake; as if my brain would burst with the terrible effort to keep calm.

It appeared that Helen had not been feeling well for some time, and had such a longing to see us twins that Morris had started with her for Paris, intending to take us by surprise; but she failed all the way, and by the time they reached Lyons was delirious.

"I had to send for one of the girls," said Morris, "and thought it would n't do to risk Vic. Besides, I remembered that I had heard Helen say a great many times lately, 'How I should like to feel the touch of Van's hand on my forehead! She used to charm away the pain.'"

I was so glad to hear that. Oh, if I only *could* charm away the pain! I had forgotten that I had that one little gift, it had been kept so long folded in a napkin.

Dr. Zelig did not see anything immediately alarming in Helen's case; thought she would have a great many ups and downs, and probably a slow recovery; and



**"I SNATCHED HIS GLOVES IN A TWINKLING, AND HELD THEM
BEHIND ME." Page 157.**

assured us Dr. Sauveur, the physician Morris had called in, was a man to be trusted.

The next morning Dr. Zelig went back to Paris. How we did dread to see him go! Perhaps he was no more skilful than Dr. Sauveur; but he was an American, and when we are in a strange land we cling to our own countrymen almost foolishly.

CHAPTER XVII.

VIC'S STORY.

"MR. UBIQUITOUS" LINGERS.

AUNT Filura says we all have our trials in this world ; some more, and others less ; and about that time I thought I had more. In the first place Van was n't round to see to me, and in the next —

But, there, I won't run on like Mrs. Nickleby. Give me order and system, or suppress me.

To begin where Van left off, then : Dr. Zelie came back from Lyons, bringing a more encouraging report of Helen than we had dared hope for, but he found poor, hystericky me in rather a collapsed condition. I had n't gone to the Du Souchets', because I was out of sorts with Clum. Henriette told me Clum said he "began to think I was an out-and-out flirt" ; and when I recollected that speech, I made up my mind to stay where I was, which I did ; and as Van was n't there to keep the fire going, I caught cold.

"What have you been doing to yourself, child?" growled Dr. Zelie, eying me sharply, as if I'd been a piece of a fly's wing under a microscope.

"Oh, nothing serious ; worrying a little and sneezing a little."

"H'm ! A profitable way of spending time ! Why, your pulse is galloping like a war-horse."

"Never mind, it'll behave now you've brought such peaceful news."

"I shall see that it does. I'm going to take you home to Aunt Filura, where you ought to have been in the first place. Come, put on your bonnet, child."

Child indeed! It did make me so provoked to think I had n't any dignity! If it had been Van he would have said "please"; but he never stopped for ceremony with me, and almost before I knew it, had whisked me away to the Du Souchets' and consigned me to Miss Wix's care.

"Need n't blame me, Aunt Filura," said I, when she began to "cosset" me for my cold. "I did n't mean to come here and plague you so; but when Dr. Zelig wills me to do a thing, I have to do it. Is it animal magnetism, or what?"

"I don't know. There's a good deal to 'Zekiel, if you ever noticed it," said Miss Wix, proudly. "I don't know anything about magnetism; but it's a mercy he got the right bent, seeing he has so much influence."

It was my private opinion that he had got too much of a bent, and was just a little warped and one-sided; but of course I would n't have hinted it to Aunt Filura, when the dear soul was waiting upon me by inches. My cold lasted a week or so, and she kept tiring herself out over me, when half the time I'd have given anything if she would n't. For instance, she was forever trying new receipts, and one morning, when she found my throat was sore, she appeared to me with a mustard paste made after a method recommended in a newspaper.

"It won't blister, Victoria, you need n't be a mite

concerned. I mixed it with the white of an egg, just according to rule."

I protested that my throat was only slightly sore, and I did n't need the paste; but she pinned it about my neck, and sat down to her netting with the most benevolent cast of countenance. Next moment there was a knock at the door. Enter Julie with a card for Miss Vic.

Mr. Ulmer was in the parlor waiting to see me. I'm sure I had n't the faintest idea he was in Paris; still his coming did n't surprise me. He had a way of flashing into sight unexpectedly like the northern lights.

Of course I would n't go down, hoarse as a crow, and in that fantastic choker; so I sent my excuses and regrets. Aunt Filura looked at me rather curiously as Julie closed the door, but she did n't say anything, except to ask me if the mustard was "drawing the pain out." Then she jerked away at her netting, puckering her lips at each knot as if they helped about the tying. I sat watching her and wondering what I should do without Van to help me entertain Mr. Ulmer. He was a social being, I knew he'd come again; and he did come the very next evening. By that time the pain was "drawn out" in a scarlet patch, just the shape of the paste, and I had to descend looking like a tattooed savage. However, I had done what I could for myself as far as frills and laces went, and had pinned on a blue ribbon here and there to subdue the red; so I flattered myself I was not an unmitigated fright.

In the hall I encountered Clum putting on his hat, and it went to my heart, for I had relied on his being

at home that evening. I snatched his gloves in a twinkling and held them behind me.

"I shan't let you go, Clum! Please help me entertain Mr. Ulmer."

"No, thank you, Vic; you don't need my poor aid in that direction."

"O Clum! do be jolly now, and lend a hand to a suffering mortal."

"Suffering! You look like it," quoth he, grumpy as a hyena; and off he stalked gloveless.

A pretty sample of French politeness! I threw down the gloves and walked into the parlor feeling like an impertinent sinner; but Mr. Ulmer greeted me as if I were a canonized saint. Of course I knew there was nothing "saintish" about me; still if the man *would* set me on a pedestal, I rather enjoyed the elevation.

"It is a great pleasure to meet you again, Miss Vic," said he in his flattering tone, that somehow conveyed the impression that my illness had been the deepest affliction of his life. I could n't help contrasting his tender manner with Clum's gruffness a moment before, and being indignant with Clum for ironing me out like a jelly-fish, whereas it seemed I was a remarkably promising vertebrate after all.

"Too bad Van is n't here," said I, after reassuring Mr. Ulmer in regard to my health.

"Yes, I regret not seeing her. Uncle Paoli tells me she probably won't return during my stay, for I shall be off again in a day or two."

"So soon? I wonder—"

"That you should have thought it worth while to

come for so snort a visit," I was going to say, but suddenly remembered my manners.

"I wonder if you'll find any other city quite so nice as Paris," I said instead.

"There's none so attractive to me at present, that's certain," responded he, beaming upon me more than the occasion demanded. I did wish Van was there to share the beam; it was certainly large enough for two.

"Yet there are places of interest in Paris that I have never seen," Mr. Ulmer went on after a pause. (Is it possible? thought I.) "For example, I've never attended the Opera Bouffe. Can you help me enjoy it to-morrow evening?"

"Can't say, really; but I'll go there with you, if you like."

"Thank you. In that case I'll answer for my enjoyment," said he, with another beam and a bow. "When may I call for you?"

Having disposed of that question, I led him on to speak of his travels. He was always ready to talk, and he talked well: it was the leaving off that embarrassed him. I had understood that he and "Peters" were "coasting along shore," but it seemed they had fallen in with Switzerland on their route; and now he described the country, the people, the productions, the scenery in general, the mountains in particular, and was about half-way up Mont Blanc, when I heard Dr. Zelie enter and go off to his study. As he opened the hall-door a draught of cold air rushed in after him, indicating a surprising change in the weather. A storm was brewing, but Mr. Ulmer meandered leisurely on, indifferent to out-of-door disturbances, and it was fifteen minutes

by the French clock before he had reached the top of that peak, — he and "Peters." Then a second rush of cold air, and the clatter of an umbrella thrust into the rack announced Clum's return. I was seized with a loud fit of coughing, and hoped the youth would be kind enough to enter the parlor; but not a bit of it; he ran directly up-stairs without affording us one cheering glimpse of the silver cross-bones. "Getting as odd as his Uncle Zeke," mused I. "In fact, they've changed places, for Uncle Zeke is becoming angelic. Please repeat that name, Mr. Ulmer?"

"Gamskash-Kogels, a peak of the Alps."

"How musical! Well, and you and Mr. Peters? What next?"

And so the Alpine travels stretched on and on. Meanwhile the elements were getting turbulent. If Mr. Ulmer had wished to escape the fury of the tempest, he ought to have gone long ago. I could hear the wind wailing about the house. It tapped on the window-pane behind me with a loose ivy-branch, and the next moment burst open the outer door, which Clum must have left unlatched in his hurry to get up-stairs, the wretch!

"Please excuse me a moment, Mr. Ulmer," said I, hurrying out to close the door. I had to push with all my might, but when it did shut, the perverse thing went together with a bang loud enough to arouse the seven sleepers; and the worst of it was it waked Henriette, who had gone to bed early with a bon-bon headache. She had heard Uncle Zeke and Clum come in, and when the door closed for the third time she naturally thought my tedious guest had departed; so what did that ill-starred girl do but skip to the balus-

ters, and shout down at the very top of her voice, "How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer?"

Merciful heavens! And Mr. Ulmer in the parlor there, not two yards from me, with the door ajar!

My cheeks burn now at the very recollection of it. I shook my finger wildly at Henriette; but she accepted that as a challenge, and only screamed louder yet, — "How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer? I say, Mrs. Ulmer, how do you do? *Comment vous portez-vous?*"

"Who then died with fear but I?" I flew up those stairs like a tornado, and garroted Henriette just in season to suppress the third anxious inquiry for "Mrs. Ulmer."

"He's here, Mr. Ulmer is *here!*" cried I, in a tragic whisper. "Henriette Du Souchet, do bury me!"

She never uttered a sound, but dropped on the floor in a little white heap, both hands over her mouth.

"I can't go back — I can't — I can't," groaned I.

"Oh dear! what will he think of me?" wailed Henriette, rocking herself to and fro like a boat in a storm. As though it was of the least consequence what he thought of her! *She* hadn't got to face him! I would n't have faced him either if blessed old Van had been there to take my place; but I could n't run and hide, and he could n't run and hide, for there was etiquette, you know.

"Count three, Henriette," said I, solemnly, "and I'll start."

"One — two — three — *fire!*" said Henriette.

I went down two steps, and rushed back to Henriette's room for a drink of water. More counting, more steps, more water. Henriette, unfeeling child, began to giggle. That frightened me, for I had begun

too, and you never could tell what would come next when either of us fell into a giggling fit. I ran down the whole flight without stopping, with just presence of mind enough left to close the parlor door behind me when I went in

"Wind blows," said I, my voice quavering like a great-grandmother's.

As I look back upon it I think it was a mercy I did not say instead, "How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer?" for the air was full of it.

Mr. Ulmer was sitting reading, so absorbed you'd have said a gunpowder explosion would n't have roused him; but he closed the book as I drew near, asking innocently, "Did you speak, Miss Vic? I beg your pardon."

"Wind blows," repeated I, with an idiotic stare at the ceiling.

"Ah well, yes, it does seem to be blowing hard."

And off he went at once into a discussion of the trade-winds, the simoom, and the whole family of winds that broke out of the cave so long ago. I never saw anybody more perfectly self-possessed; and if it had n't been an insult to human reason, I could almost have believed he had n't overheard Henriette. Was it possible that he inherited deafness from his Uncle Paoli?

I thought he would go very soon, but he did n't. He talked and talked, pretending to have such a good time that he could n't tear himself away; till when he actually did leave, and walk forth into the rainy darkness with Clum's umbrella, I had really got to feeling half-way comfortable.

Ah, but could I ever look him in the face again?

CHAPTER XVIII.

VAN'S STORY.

DR. ZELIE AT LYONS.

AND all this while I, Van, was at Lyons, with nothing in the world to do at first but put fresh flowers in the vases and keep the nurse from whispering to Helen ; she never could remember that a whisper drove her wild.

In a few days, when the poor child came to her senses, and knew I was Van and not one of the little waiting-maids she had left at Rome, she was overjoyed to see me. Then she wanted me always in sight, and I sat by the hour chafing her hot temples and talking to her about home and old times. She was by no means out of danger ; new and alarming symptoms were continually coming up, and Morris said it was a great comfort to have some one there to speak to beside the nurse, — some one who loved Helen and could share his anxiety.

Yes, I knew it was so ; still I must own the days dragged a little. After I had overseen Helen's broths and gruels, to make sure they would taste as if they came out of our home-kitchen, I could only sit and watch the changes that came over her face, and answer the faint questions she asked.

I knew, by the way she talked about Quinnebasset, that she had been a little homesick. She saw the old town through a rosy mist, and the people in it were as dear to her as if they were in heaven. I could understand the feeling partly, but I saw she had not been as contented at Rome as Vic and I at Paris. Why not? To be sure she had n't had Aunt Filura and the whole Du Souchet family; but then she had had Morris! Was there a little corner of her heart he could n't quite fill? I queried about that. "Marriage is n't so blissful after all," I thought; "it's nothing to twin-sisterhood. Now Vic and I must read a lesson from this, and never marry. How can we, indeed, when we are already mated? How can a twin-soul ever find another twin-soul?" I had always felt perfectly clear on this subject, and so had Vic; but since I came to Lyons I was tormented with an entirely new fear: "What if Vic should change her mind?" Morris asked a great many questions about her behavior, her admirers, etc.

"How happens this Mr. Ulmer back at Paris so soon? Is he particularly agreeable to Vic?"

"No, indeed; she laughs about him." And I showed Morris two of her last letters, in which she had drawn off-hand sketches of him with her pen. "Mr. Ulmer taking his leave," was one. He stood in a pelting rain, waving a closed umbrella, bowing double, and smiling to show all his teeth: that was the way he looked after the "How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer?" "I and Peters doing the Alps," was another, — Mr. Ulmer, of gigantic size, carrying a baby Peters pickaback up a huge mountain. As Mr. Peters was much larger in real life than Mr. Ulmer, the caricature was very funny.

Morris laughed heartily, and said Vic's talent for drawing ought to be cultivated, but he supposed her talent for music would stand in the way, for two such gifts divide a house against itself

"She makes fun of this young Ulmer, and at the same time corresponds with him," said Morris, disapprovingly. "That does n't sound just right." I knew it did n't, and it sounded worse than ever when he put it in plain English, and Vic was n't there to laugh it off.

"But perhaps she likes him better than she thinks," went on Morris. "She is so sudden in all her moods that there is never any accounting for her."

"Oh, but she can't like him, I know she can't," said I, wincing as if a porcupine quill had been shot at me.

"Does she say much about him in her letters?"

"Oh, yes; her mind seems to be in a perfect commotion, and Mr. Ulmer goes round and round in it like a stick in a whirlpool," said I. "He's a person you can't get rid of, that's all."

Still, I did think it odd she should speak of him in *every* letter, for she wrote daily. And why was she forever asking my opinion of him, when I had told her at least fifty times that I supposed he was an excellent young man, but I did n't fancy him?

Sometimes she would agree with me that he was conceited, and then again she would defend him.

"Why do you write so differently at different times?" I asked.

"Oh, I write some letters out of one part of my brain and some out of another," said she; and I had to take that for an answer.

I did so long to see the child! We had never been separated but once before, and then only for three days; and now that Helen was really very much better, I could almost have flown to get back to Vic. You that are not twins don't know and can't understand the feeling, I'm sure.

It seemed as if I might be spared, but Morris did not think so. He said Vic was well provided for at the Du Souchets', and he had forgotten there was such a thing as school. He took it for granted I should stay at Lyons as long as Helen had the least wish for me; so what could I do? "Good-by to that diploma," thought I. "I was n't very likely to have it in the first place, and now it is out of the question" But dear me! even a forlorn hope is hard to give up.

I would n't have had Morris know how much I thought of that Hôtel de Ville, or of Vic. He would have laughed at me if I had said "I must go back and attend to my twin." But I did think she needed one of my scoldings. I was the only person on the European continent who had a right to scold her, unless it was Helen. I wished Aunt Filura would take the right, but I knew she would n't, and what was to be the end of that Ulmer affair?

One day, while I was thinking it over and feeling as if I could n't stay in Lyons another minute, Helen was taken suddenly worse. The symptoms were new and alarming, and my heart smote me that I had longed even for a moment to run away from her. Morris and I both felt as if we would like to see Dr Zelie; so we dispatched, and he came at once, losing the weekly session of the Academy of Science by the means.

Before he reached Lyons Helen was better. We knew we had been foolish to send, but we were so glad to see Helen rally that we could n't get up the least remorse.

Dr. Zelig ran his fingers through his hair and called us "a couple of simpletons"; but we rather enjoyed that, because it was spoken in English. He had missed a train, and could not go home till night; so in the afternoon he took me to the silk manufactories. I remember it was the first day of really fine weather I had seen in Lyons, and my heart was as light as a bird's.

"I am glad to see a little color creeping into your face," said Dr. Zelig. "You fret too much about your sister, do you know it?"

"Which sister?"

"Oh," said he, laughing. "have you got Vic on your mind too? Well, she does need overseeing."

I was a little piqued at that.

"You don't understand me, sir. I want to *see* Vic, and how can you think it strange?"

He changed his tone in a moment. Somehow he had received the impression that I was a person of horrid temper, and not to be trifled with.

"Yes, I can imagine you and Vic must miss each other astonishingly. How long shall you stay at Lyons?"

"Till Morris sends me away."

"That's right And how about Hôtel de Ville?"

"Oh, I've given that up."

By that time we had entered one of the silk-rooms, and a man was taking us about and showing us the looms. My head spins now, thinking of that machinery.

When we returned to the hotel the nurse had just gone out for her daily walk, and Morris was sitting with Helen, who was asleep. I took Dr. Zelig into the public parlor. "We can talk here," said I, "and it will not disturb her."

"Perhaps this may be as good a time as I shall ever have to question you about your studies," said the dreadful man, with a cool smile that sent a shiver down my back. He seemed so old and wise compared to myself, it was hard to believe he was only twenty-five or six. There was no getting out of it, so I sat up and was catechised. It was n't half so bad as I had expected. He began with very simple questions, which soon put me quite at my ease, and when he had by degrees launched me into deep waters, I hardly knew I was there. It surprised me that I did so well. It must have been because Dr. Zelig let one idea lead up to another, for I seemed to know things I had only guessed at before. There certainly is a great art in the way of "putting things," and I felt Dr. Zelig must be a "tip-top teacher," as Clum had always declared.

Well, the end of it was, he professed himself very much pleased with the examination. I told him the credit was due to himself, but he would n't hear to that. He said he had not supposed I was half so well grounded, or he should not have discouraged me about the diploma.

"Do you really think we might try for it?" said I, my hopes rising.

"*We!* I can't answer for Vic, but I think *you* might try, — that is, if you'll keep up your health by exercise and not kill yourself beforehand by worrying.

By the way, did you ever hear of Queen Elizabeth's advice to worriers?"

"No."

"‘They are wisest,’ said she, ‘who trip lightly through life; for earth is a bog.’ Well, Vandelia, why do you smile? Isn't that true?"

"Yes, sir; only I was thinking I tread as lightly as you do, perhaps, Dr. Zelig!"

I don't remember that I ever saw him blush before, but he blushed then to the very roots of his hair.

"I forgot you could turn upon me," said he. "I'm the last person to preach, for I've been in pretty much of a quagmire ever since you knew me, Vandelia; but I'm well out of it now, thank Heaven! and my feet are on dry land."

I knew he meant something about *Félicité*, but what I could not tell. He stopped there. Was he going on? He looked at me, but I looked straight down at my feet. I would not betray the least curiosity.

"Yes, I'm on dry land," repeated he, "and I've a great mind to tell you how I got there. You already know so much of the story that I'd like to have you know all."

Before I could make any answer Morris came in to say Helen was awake and inquiring for us. After that I did not see Dr. Zelig alone again for a moment. But just as he was leaving he turned to Morris and asked him if it would n't be a good idea for me to have my school-books sent on by express, so I could keep up with my studies.

"Oh, capital!" said I. "And Vic could write me

every day where the lessons are to be. I have so much time, you know."

But Morris was doubtful. "You said yourself she was looking pale, doctor; so I think a vacation is just what she needs. We don't want to make her mad with much learning just yet."

"Much learning is n't half as likely to make her mad as much moping," said Dr. Zelig; and I was glad his eyes were sharp enough to see that.

He carried the day and I got my school-books. I was ever so much happier after that. His visit had stirred me up wonderfully by giving me a new stimulus; still I regretted two things. Firstly, that I had n't let him go on and tell more about Vic and Mr. Ulmer, as he meant to. Secondly, that he had n't finished the story of Félicité and the quagmire.

CHAPTER XIX.

VIC'S STORY.

THE REIGN OF VICTORIA.

"The thing a woman says she won't,
She's always sure of doing."

AND all this while that Van was at Lyons, taking such lovely care of Helen that she would n't let a mouse whisper in the wall, what was I, Vic, up to?

I don't want to tell; but Van won't let me skip the chapter; she says 't will spoil the story.

Well, if I must write it, I must; but I do it with shame and confusion of face.

To go back to "How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer?" That night I tossed about like a raging billow, so afraid of oversleeping that I waked at all hours but the right one, till, impelled by innate depravity, I dozed off at last and never heard the breakfast-bell. What did arouse me was the prolonged and unearthly creaking of our chamber-door, which Henriette was trying to close noiselessly. It seemed that Aunt Filura's oiled feather had failed to relieve those suffering hinges.

"Wait for me, Henriette, do!" I cried; but by that

time she was skimming along the lower hall, and singing, —

“ A la rive fidèle,
Où l' on aime toujours.”

“ Loves always,” indeed! Henriette was n't in the habit of crooning love-songs before breakfast, little witch! and I knew well enough this was only a prelude to the story of last night's adventure, that she'd be giving next minute with lively variations

I made haste in dressing, you may believe. If I was going to be dramatized, I was bound to have a share in the performance. But ruffles are snares and crimps a deceit, and when it came to boots, the button-hook had vanished, and I had to sacrifice five precious minutes, not to mention three hair-pins and two finger-nails, before I could get my feet in good running order. So it fell out that as I entered the dining-room Dr. Zelig was just rising from the table.

“ How do you do, Mrs Ulmer?” cried Henriette, pushing back her chair and giving me a stage courtesy. “ Nunkey, allow me the distinguished pleasure — ”

“ Nonsense, Henriette. Finish your breakfast,” said he, passing me with a cool bow and a dissecting glance, as if he wanted to lay my heart bare and see what was in it. I wondered why? What were Mr. Ulmer's comings and goings to him? I did hope he was n't intending to take up Aunt Marian's rôle of supervising me. It was plain both he and Clum were prejudiced against Lucius Ulmer.

“ So glad my still small voice didn't disturb anybody's tête-à-tête last night!” went on Henriette, clasping her hands with a comic air of relief. “ If

it had startled Mr. Ulmer and sent him away at an untimely hour, I could have wept!"

"Better weep now," suggested I, "before I shake you."

"Henriette, are n't you ashamed of yourself?" exclaimed Clum indignantly. "After your last night's performance, I should think an apology was in order."

I looked up gratefully at Clum, but could not meet his eye. Henriette was subdued for a moment.

"I'm afraid you haven't got your sleep made up, Victoria," said Aunt Filura, kindly, handing me my coffee. "You must curl down on the lounge after the boys go, and catch a nap"

That set Henriette into a spasm of giggling. She said Aunt Filly was a good friend to lovers; she ought to write an essay on "Courtship Made Easy"

"Which you ought to read, 'Sister Malaprop,'" observed Clum, passing the rolls. "Talk of Uncle Paoli's putting himself round in the way! When did he ever rise in the night-watches to interrupt a tender interview?"

I fired up at that sarcasm, which did n't seem a bit like Clum; he is usually so sweet-tempered.

"H'm!" said I, flourishing my napkin. "Don't know what you mean by a tender interview, Clum. Mine with Mr. Ulmer last evening I call tough, remarkably tough. Henriette tried her best to break it up, but could n't!"

"Truth, Vic!" laughed Henriette. "How long did he stay after that? Two hours, was n't it? I suppose he would n't go till you'd name the happy day"

"Henriette!" said Clum, severely. He evidently thought she was twitting upon facts, and I didn't

wonder. Mr. Ulmer's late stay certainly looked like "serious intentions."

I could n't stand it another minute. "Why, Henriette Du Souchet," cried I, impulsively, "you might as well marry me to a long-metre hymn, and done with it. No, my sweet child; if I'm ever beguiled into changing my *silly* *station*, it'll be by a tongue-tied man that can't talk me to death. And I say 't was downright cruel in all of you to go off and leave me last night!"

Clum laughed and Henriette laughed, but Aunt Filura looked pained. Never mind: I had set everybody right at last, and there was no danger of future mistakes.

"Victoria," said Aunt Filura, the first time we were alone together, "I can't help feeling ugly for this young man, when I hear you making sport of him so."

"Then I won't do it any more, auntie; but it's too funny, the way he hangs round."

"Ain't you a little to blame there, think?" asked she, gently, not looking at me but straight at the weaver's knot she was tying. Then she suddenly dropped her netting. "I've had you on my mind a good deal lately, Victoria," added she, smoothing her left sleeve the way of the nap. "You have n't your own folks to advise with, and I've laid awake nights questioning whether or no I had n't a duty to perform."

"Duty to perform!" That brought up Aunt Marian and her lectures — but with a difference. If charitable Aunt Filura felt called upon to reprove me, what a first-class reprobate I must be!

"I'm afraid you've been a little inconsiderate about Mr. Ulmer, Victoria," said she, reluctantly, still not

looking at me. "I'm afraid you've encouraged him more'n you ought to, that is, if you really don't have any drawing towards him."

"Why, Aunt Filura, what in the world have I done?"

"You haven't meant anything out of the way, I'm confident of that,—I told 'Zekiel so this morning; but seems to me, if you don't want to marry Mr. Ulmer, you ought not to let him get attached to you."

"Well, I won't; I'll beg him not to, if you say so, auntie."

Aunt Filura smiled patiently. "If he is n't anything to you, I guess you can manage to make him understand it, Victoria, without going so far as that. But maybe you do care more for him than you're aware of. Only there is Mr. Theobold: I've had my suspicions about *him*, too. Anyway, I should want to be sure of my own heart."

Well, I did want to be, I supposed, though I had n't thought of it before.

"Because, if you're interested in Mr. Ulmer, that puts another face on it, and I've nothing to say. Of course in that case you'd write to your mother; but if you are not interested, I should hate to be beholden to him."

"Why, Aunt Filura, he never gave me a thing but some photographs and a paper-folder. Would you have me send those back?"

"I meant I would n't be beholden to him for his attentions, Victoria; I should be loath to go around with him so."

"Yes, I guess you would be loath after that dreadful affair last night. But oh dear, oh dear, Aunt Filura!

I've promised to go with him to the Opera Bouffe this evening, and how *can* I look him in the face?"

"I'm real sorry for you, I'm sure."

"I hope I shall live through it, that's all; and to-morrow he'll be tramping off to Egypt, and I'm glad of it."

I was sure Aunt Filura was glad too by the jerking of her elbows as she twitched away at her netting. "You see I've spoken pretty plain, Victoria," said she, deprecatingly, "plainer than I should if Vandeely had been here to tell you what was best; but I hope I haven't done any mischief by meddling?"

"You can't meddle, you dear woman, *you* don't know how," said I, straightening her cap and running off to school. But on the way to Madame Rey's those last words came back to me with a sting in them: "If Vandeely had been here to tell you what was best." Polite, really! Did Aunt Filura think all the sense of the Asbury twins was wrapped up in Van? I fancied I was as old as she was, and wise enough to have the responsibility of myself. And there was one thing I would like to have explained: why was it that everybody labored under the delusion that they had "a duty to perform" in regard to me?

The next day Dr. Zelig was summoned to Lyons by a dispatch, as mentioned in the last chapter. He returned the day after, with glowing accounts of Van. "So perfectly adapted to the sick-room, so quiet, gentle, and self-forgetting"

"But she says she isn't needed there," returned I, "and I should think she might as well come home."

"What'd you say? You can trust Vandeely to manage her own business; she ain't one of these kind that

flies off on a tangent," said Uncle Paoli, sharply. "But I'd give a five-dollar bill to see the girl. I'll warrant I care more about it than you do, Victory, for I ain't flying round so, and don't have so much company to take up my mind "

"I hope she is n't working too hard, Uncle Zeke," said Clum, anxiously. "I never saw her match for taking care of other people."

"*Et tu Clum?*" thought I. "Ah well! he enjoys joking and laughing with me, but he likes Van best after all. Everybody likes her best excepting Mr. Ulmer." I was ashamed of it, but I did tire of hearing her praises sounded. Did they all think she was perfect? I could tell them several things about her that were n't precisely angelic. I loved her better than I loved anybody else in the world; but I did n't want her overestimated, and for those very virtues in which I myself was rather lacking. Why, they did n't seem to consider me of the least consequence; I felt like a candle burning in the daytime. Why would n't somebody put me out?

Well, Mr. Ulmer's "day or two" lasted a great while, — more than a week surely, and the morning before he left I visited the Gardens of Acclimation with him. I had been very good and discreet since Aunt Filura's talk, contriving not to go out with him alone very much; but that morning I positively could n't help it. The weather was very capricious that winter, and I remember how sunny it was as we left the house, and how Mr. Ulmer spread his silk umbrella, and we sauntered down the street slowly, saying it was too warm to walk fast.

Mr. Ulmer was looking marvellously fine, from the tip of his tall hat to the toe of his French kid boot,—fine enough to be going a-wooing, certainly. The thought popped into my head, and stayed there, along with all Aunt Filura had said, confusing me so that I could hardly manage a sentence. But Mr. Ulmer found plenty to say, and talked without ceasing. On the way we met Mr. Theobold, who bowed timidly. My head was so full of that ridiculous “How do you do, Mrs. Ulmer?” that I had n’t the courage to speak.

At the entrance to the Bois de Boulogne, Mr. Ulmer made me sit down to rest, insisting that I appeared fatigued. “And that’ll never do,” said he, blandly. “You know I always mean to take the best of care of you.” It was lovely to feel that he thought I was well worth caring for, too ; but yet it was embarrassing.

“There’s happy childhood for you,” said I, irrelevantly, pointing to a little boy and girl quarrelling near us.

Mr. Ulmer looked as if he could n’t see the connection between that remark and his last, but glanced at the children as desired, and remarked indifferently that their *bonne*, strolling up and down the path with them, was a good illustration of the French government,—it was a complete system of espionage.

“Yes?” said I, absently, thinking how elegantly he always rounded his periods.

“My dear Miss Vic, you don’t seem like yourself. Do tell me what troubles you. Nobody can feel a deeper interest in you than I, you must know that.”

“Troubled? Do I look troubled? Well, it tries me to see that little wretch pelt his sister with nut-shells. Let’s go on and leave them.”

"Just as you say, Miss Vic. Your will is law. You can wind me round your little finger."

When it came to that — to his likening himself to a tow-string — it was getting serious. I felt he must be in a most extraordinary state of mind.

"Miss Vic, do you realize this is our last morning together for some months to come?"

"Yes, sir. You said yesterday you were going to visit the Nile. Do bring me home a crocodile's tear, won't you, please? You might bottle it, you know."

"And before I go, Miss Vic, there's something —"

I darted away among the trees to examine a patch of moss, — not that I'd have picked any and soiled my new kids, but it seemed best to be stirring.

"Never mind; it was n't very pretty," said I, presently, coming back empty-handed.

"Before I —"

"You can't guess what this wood reminds me of, Mr. Ulmer."

"Of one at Quinnebasset, I dare say."

"Yes, Dr. Prescott's, where we had the society picnic. Do you remember?"

"I rather think I do, Miss Vic. I first met you there. You wore a white dress and a crown of full-blown dandelions; and you kept the company laughing the whole afternoon. I thought you were the brightest girl I ever saw in my life."

"Owing to the full-blown dandelions; they must have been brilliant. And do you remember how Pecky Liscom persecuted you with tarts and Washington pie?"

"No; did she? I had forgotten. I was studying you, Vic."

"How foolish!" said I, with a nervous laugh. "You oughtn't to have descended to such light reading. It would have been more profitable to have studied Van."

"Not for me; each one to his taste, Victoria. And you'll pardon me; but it does annoy me the way you constantly defer to your sister. She seems to exercise unlimited influence over you. To observe it, one might almost fancy you were incapable of acting for yourself, when the fact is, your judgment is better than hers."

Did he really think so? Why, that was refreshing. I wished Clum and Dr. Zelig could have heard the remark.

We had passed through the Bois de Boulogne into the Garden of Plants, and were just entering the large greenhouse, which was nearly deserted. I can see Mr. Ulmer now, punching holes in the sand with the tip of his umbrella, while he continued more playfully,—"Miss Van is a nice girl, an admirable girl; only it is conceited in her to think she can be superior to you in anything. You yield to her too much, my dear Victoria. I want you to learn to assert yourself."

So he thought, just as Aunt Filura did, that I was tied to Van's apron-strings. Then there was something in it, perhaps, and Van did take on airs with me. The idea irritated me so that I hardly observed the tender tone Mr. Ulmer had fallen into, until he went on to say, with the most insinuating smile, that he wouldn't quarrel with my sister so long as she didn't try to control my affections; but he hardly thought he could bear that.

Then I had to gather my wits about me and talk as

fast as ever I could. I asked about the little river winding along at our feet. Was it artificial? And where did the water come from? And how did they make the mimic islands? Were there rocks at the base? And weren't the rustic bridges lovely? And, oh dear! we must certainly go and see the grotto.

"Yes, dearest Victoria; but first I have a question I want to ask you."

"Oh, no! don't, for pity's sake, Mr. Ulmer. Ask somebody else. I never could answer questions. Can't even say the catechism."

"But, Victoria, I leave to-morrow, and —"

"Oh, yes; and you're going to bring me a crocodile's tear; don't forget. And now you must tell me about your journey. Where do you go first?"

"To Marseilles, to join Peters; but as I was saying, Victoria —"

"Oh, yes; you go to Marseilles, and from thence you set sail, I suppose, and cruise along the Mediterranean. That'll be so jolly if you're not sea-sick, and you never are sea-sick, are you? No, I thought not. You're so used to the ocean. And is it really good for your throat?"

That was the way I rattled on all the way home. Mr. Ulmer could n't have got a word in edgeways. It seemed to me I should go frantic if he proposed; for as to knowing my own heart, as Aunt Filura had recommended, I didn't know a thing about it, only it appeared to be an unpleasant organ somewhere in the region of my throat.

We met Henriette at the gate, and by freemason signs I made her understand that she must n't go away;

so she stayed, like a good girl, and helped me through the last good by to Mr. Ulmer. He wore a look of injured patience, for he was going at an unearthly hour in the morning, and would n't see me again.

But that was n't the last of it. He wrote me a letter the moment he reached Marseilles, — a downright love letter, eight pages long. Striking out the tender parts, it ran something this way :—

He could n't sail into exile until he had heard from me, and we had arrived at a more complete understanding. He had intended to declare himself at the Bois de Boulogne, as I must have known very well; but I would n't let him, I was such a coy little maiden. Would I listen to him now? Might our long and delightful intercourse at last result in an engagement? He believed he had reason to hope I was not indifferent to him; but would I not assure him of this at once? He should await my reply with impatience at Marseilles. Peters might wonder and frown at his dallying, but he would not budge a step towards Egypt till my answer came. "And remember, dear, it must be a favorable one," added he, with a playful flourish. "I flatter myself I can read your secret heart. You belong to *me*, and Miss Van has nothing whatever to say about it."

There it was again. It was the third time I'd been twitted lately of being under Van's thumb. I'd decide this thing for myself, or perish in the attempt. Then I turned back to the letter, and positively grew faint at sight of the date, for it was written nearly a week before, and must have been delayed on the road.

So abominable! And Mr. Ulmer at Marseilles all

this while, waiting like Barkis, and most likely supposing I'd called a family council to sit on his proposal and help me make up my mind! I must write him something that minute. No time to consult Van if I wanted to, and I did n't. I'd show the child I could walk alone. Besides, what did she know of love matters? She'd never had an offer in her life.

I dragged out my writing-desk, and stabbed my pen into the head of the "cross old man," — for I was home at Madame Rey's now, — and then I waited.

It seemed Mr. Ulmer thought I'd encouraged him. So did Dr. Zelig. So did Aunt Filura. So did Brother Morris. What did Clum think? Why, Clum did n't consider me worth thinking about anyway. I was merely an unworthy satellite of Van's.

Well, *had* I encouraged Mr. Ulmer? Yes; it could n't be denied. I had allowed things to go so far that if I drew back now I should be doing wrong, and he would have a right to say I had trifled with him. I would n't trifle; 't was unprincipled.

Besides, did n't I like the man extremely? Was n't he a perfect gentleman? Had n't he borne all my little freaks and admired everything I said and did, no matter how foolish? Who was there that appreciated me like Lucius Ulmer? I ought to be grateful to him certainly. I was grateful; and I more than suspected I was in love, yes, very much in love.

With that I drew out my pen and dashed off a few lines of acceptance. The ink had dried while I was away and was as thick as mud. It was the blackest letter I ever wrote. How the words stared at me from the white paper!

Well, it was done. The Du Souchets would find out now they were mistaken when they said I flirted, for I thought I would let them know this immediately.

My hands trembled as I folded and directed the letter. What if I did n't care enough about Mr. Ulmer? People do make mistakes sometimes and are sorry all their lives long. Oh, well! I must take the risk. I should n't see him for four months, and it was pretty well if I could n't fall dead in love with him in that time.

I did have a faint feeling of satisfaction in the thought of being engaged before Van was, and without her knowing it either. I'll own it now; but I won't own I ever thought of Uncle Paoli's money which was coming to Lucius. It did n't once enter my head; it certainly did n't.

CHAPTER XX.

VAN'S STORY.

VAN REBELLIOUS.

THEY say wells sink before the coming of an earthquake; and perhaps it was on the same principle that my heart sank just before Vic's engagement. I did n't know what ailed me; but I was low-spirited, and the more Helen improved the more unhappy I grew. Something was amiss with Vic, I was sure of that from the reckless tone of her letters; and it was a great relief at last when Morris said I might as well return to Paris and leave Helen to follow by easy stages. It was Helen's suggestion, I think, and she insisted that Morris should go with me. "It would be pretty well," she said, "if Sister Anastasia could n't take care of her alone for twenty-four hours." I thought so too; for she was now strong enough to sit up a little, and was beginning to have an appetite. We left her reclining in an easy chair, with her feet on a *scaldino*, and she looked so happy and so sure to get well that the parting did not trouble me much. I thought I should see her again in a week.

When we arrived in Paris, Dr. Zelig and Clum were at the depot, and took us home with them to tea; and there was dear old Vic, dancing out of the yard laugh-

ing and crying. What a bright picture she made in her new merino, with the coral roses dangling from her ears and the softer roses glowing in her cheeks! I thought she had certainly grown pretty since I left her a month ago. I was so glad and so thankful to see her and feel the touch of her arms round my neck! And was n't it as good as the opera and the theatre to hear her talk and watch her face? I laughed at myself for my presentiments, and concluded I must have been a "worrier" to have borrowed any trouble about Vic, for I had never seen her in finer spirits.

Aunt Filura was as genuine and good as ever, and every creature in the house had a welcome for me, even Clum's dog Tantra Bogus, and Clarice's cat Agrippa. As for poor Julie Papeneau, she had gone home to her aunt, to be nursed through a lung fever, which had attacked her in spite of the protecting bones of St. Francis. I had never been so happy in Paris as I was for a few hours that evening. It seemed next to going back to Quinnebasset, only the very likeness gave me a longing for the thing itself, a half-homesickness for mother and Bel and little Morris. Vic and I crept close together, and sat hand in hand on the sofa, and I never doubted that I knew her whole heart, just as she knew mine. I never once thought of Lucius Ulmer, till Uncle Paoli reminded me that I had n't inquired for him.

"Why, Van, you have n't seen the flowers I bought yesterday for my hat," cried Vic, suddenly seizing me by the arm and whirling me out of the room. We had both been wanting to get a moment to ourselves, but had n't found it easy to withdraw from the room while every one was talking.

As soon as we were up-stairs and Vic had shown me the exquisite heliotropes and violets, and I had admired them, though I could n't say they were becoming, she flung her arms round me, exclaiming, "O Van, you blessed, blessed Van! what did make you stay away from me so long? I've been through everything since you went off."

The sudden change in her manner amazed me. "Why, darling, what is it? I thought you seemed very happy."

"So I am," said she, wiping her eyes, "only these flowers make me look hideous.

'If they be not fair for me,
What care I how fair they be?'"

Sang she, shaking her head at the glass.

"What is it? Do tell me, what is it?"

"Wait till curtain-lecture time, Van, and I will. I don't have curtain-lectures now-a-nights, you know, and I miss 'em."

"Vic, you must and shall tell me this minute. You've got into some sort of fix, and I will know what it is."

Something in my tone touched the wrong chord, and she drew back haughtily. "Now don't go to trying the lady superior, Vandelia. I'm not obliged to do as Simon says. I've done it long enough."

"Why, Vic, what does ail you? I never heard you talk so before."

"No, of course you never did. I've been tied to your apron-strings all my life, and you think that's

where I belong. Everybody says you've judgment enough for both."

"Why, Victoria!"

"And what did mother do when I left home but put me in your care! It provokes me now to think I allowed it. Lectured *me* about love-affairs, and never a word to you,—and there you stood as demure as a kitten. Yes, but we'd hardly got to Paris before you struck up a correspondence with a strange lady, without asking my advice, or even listening to it. Was that a wise proceeding for a person who had judgment enough for two?"

"It was a very silly thing, Vic, my writing to Félicité, and if I had it to do over again I should know better."

"Oh, would you? I'm glad to hear that. You do make mistakes sometimes, but nobody perceives it. When Helen was sick Morris sent for you post-haste. I could n't help thinking then, what was the use of two of us when you were perfect without me? What's the need of me anyway?"

"O Vic, dear, this does n't sound like yourself. You know I could help Helen's head and you could n't. I should n't think you'd envy your untalented sister the only gift she has in the world."

"Untalented!" said Vic, bitterly. "You have 'the genius to be loved,' and I have n't. I'd give my right hand to be loved as you are."

"O Vic, you do make me positively unhappy! There's not a word of truth in all this you've conjured up. What gave you the idea all of a sudden?"

"Why, I happened to come to my senses," said Vic,

making up a face as if she had been eating green chokecherries. "Henriette has kindly informed me that Clum calls me a flirt, Aunt Filura gives me small lectures, and Dr. Zelig snubs me. Oh, I'm bright enough, if I once have a hint! Van Asbury, I do believe there's only one person on this side of the Atlantic Ocean who really understands me."

"Oh well, Vic, of course you mustn't expect outsiders will understand you as I do," replied I, kissing her.

She blushed and looked confused.

"Yes, dear, as for affection and all that. But I was thinking of this family notion about my want of judgment. Now, you have that notion like all the rest. But there is one person who isn't warped and prejudiced in that way. *He* sees right through it, and thinks I ought to get out from under your thumb."

"He? Who?"

"Why, Mr. Ulmer, you know," said she, in the faintest whisper.

I could n't speak till the room stopped whirling. It seemed as if the end of all things was at hand.

"I don't mean he doesn't want me to love you, — O Van, *don't* think that! — only that I should n't yield to you in everything."

"Did you say — Lucius — Ulmer?"

"Y-e-s."

"And what right has *he* to come between us?"

"Don't look at me so, Van! Don't look at me so! I suppose —"

"*What* right?"

"O Van, how your eyes glare! I must get away

from your eyes," said Vic, falling on my neck and sobbing out the whole story.

The truth came over me like lightning, flash on flash.

"Why, Van, speak,—do speak! Anybody would think I'd committed a crime."

I could n't. I just looked at her; and the steel that is in both our natures met and struck fire. My eyes said, "What right had you to do this without consulting *me*?" and her eyes retorted, "What right have *you* to call *me* to account?" But the fire soon died out of Vic's eyes.

"O Van, he just worships me! and I guess there is n't anything insensible to worship unless it's a graven image—don't you?"

No reply.

"Why, Van dear, I never thought of your being angry. It only happened three days ago, and I've been so eager to tell you. I know you don't fancy Mr. Ulmer, but you've said repeatedly you thought him an excellent young man. You don't blame me?" said Vic, imploringly.

Still I could n't speak. A dumb devil possessed me. Vic threw herself on the bed in tears, and I rushed out of the room. Never since our early childhood had I been really angry with her before,—never since we used to quarrel as to whose turn it was to carry the dinner-basket. At such times we set the basket down in the middle of the road, and marched on to school; but Vic was always the one to go back and get the basket,—always, always! It was I who "sulked it out," like a base little Indian.

I was so supremely wretched that I scarcely knew what I did. I started to go down-stairs, got half-way, and seated myself on one of the steps. The hall-lamp had not been lighted, and I was in utter darkness; but in that mood I loved darkness rather than light. .

And this was what I had come back to Paris for,—to find myself deserted by the dearest friend I had in the world! Deserted for Lucius Ulmer, a man I had heard her ridicule time and again!

It was bitter cruel,—it was downright wicked! If he had been worthy of her I could almost have borne it, or if she had loved him. But I was sure she did n't, my instincts told me her words had n't the true ring. I could see just how it had all come about. She had always been flattered by Mr. Ulmer's attentions, had encouraged him thoughtlessly, and now felt obliged to accept him because he took it for granted she would. She was always going to extremes in just that way. Oh, if I had only been with her to stop her! Why was she left to do herself harm? I understood the drift of the thing perfectly, and the undercurrent of jealousy that had helped it along. Still I could not forgive her: she ought to have let me know! "It is too dreadful!" I moaned aloud; but as I spoke I was startled by a glare of light. Dr. Zelie had entered the hall noiselessly by one of the side-doors, and was lighting the gas. Seeing me, he came up the stairs towards me, exclaiming, "Why, Vandelia, you have fallen and hurt yourself. No wonder, for the entry was pitch dark."

"No, sir, I'm not hurt," said I, rising, but instantly sitting down again.

He looked at me in surprise. "But, Vandelia, you

are frightfully pale. If you are not hurt, you must be sick."

The tone was so kind that I burst forth impetuously, "No, doctor; my heart is breaking, that's all."

What he could have thought I don't know, but he stood silent a moment, and then said, "If you feel like that, do for pity's sake cry."

"Cry? I can't cry. I'm too angry!"

"Well, then, use me for a lightning-rod to discharge your wrath upon. Scold at me, and perhaps you'll feel better, Vandelia."

He waited a moment to see whether I wanted to say anything more, but I only wrung my hands, and cried, "Oh, this world is dreadful, Dr. Zelig, just dreadful!"

"I agree with you; there could n't be a better place contrived for discipline."

And then he eyed me again keenly. I did not think of it at the time, but my conduct must have struck him as very singular. He had not the slightest clew to it, did not even know I had just been talking with Vic. I believe he was afraid I was losing my wits.

"Vandelia, don't you want to go into the parlor?" said he. "This entry is down to shivering-point, and you'll certainly take cold."

"No, but I'll tell you where I do want to go: to that eagle's nest up there in the belfry at Notre Dame, where that old man and woman live, and that canary bird. I want to go there and get out of this dreadful world!"

Dr. Zelig made no reply to that, but walked off and left me. Then I came to my senses enough to know I had been talking very wildly, and to wonder if he had

gone to fetch Aunt Filura. I would have fled up-stairs to Vic, but pride and anger would not allow it.

In a minute Dr. Zelig returned with a shawl, which he pinned around my shoulders.

"Poor child, if you won't take care of yourself, that is the best I can do for you," said he, and turned to go down again.

"Come back here a moment, please. Don't tell anybody where I am."

"No."

"And don't think I'm crazy, Dr. Zelig. I'm only trying to compose my mind."

He seated himself on the stair beside me, thinking perhaps that I needed help in composing my mind. I am sure I did.

"I have just heard something that makes me very unhappy; but I can't tell you what it is, doctor, for it's another person's affair, not mine."

"I'll warrant it, Vandelia. When you get stuck in Queen Elizabeth's bog, it is always for the sake of somebody else, is n't it?"

"Queen Elizabeth's bog?" I repeated. And then I remembered the conversation I had had with him a little while before at Lyons. "Oh, yes, sir, you began to tell me how you had been in that bog yourself and got out. You must finish the story some time."

"If you really care to hear it."

"Oh, I do. Tell it now; maybe it will divert my mind."

"But are you warm enough here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, once upon a time," he began, in a sooth-



"HE SEATED HIMSELF ON THE STAIR BESIDE ME." Page 192.

ing tone, very much as we talk to a cross child, "I was such a fool as to fall in love with a woman for her beauty. Did you ever hear of such a thing, Vandelia?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I suppose that is common enough."

"Do you? You see I was younger then than I am now, and as poor as poverty. I had finished my college course at nineteen, and come out to Paris to study medicine."

"Yes, I know."

"And the best friend I had at that time was Dr. Morazain, the father of—Félicité."

"I've heard of that, too."

"Well, he is dead now; but heaven bless him, wherever he is!"

Dr. Zelie cleared his throat, and began again rather hurriedly.

"I told you I was a fool. I knew nothing but books, and what are they? I had no knowledge of human nature. My simplicity was,—well, I should say it was sublime. You take a young man of unbounded energy, without a grain of common-sense,—I mean worldly prudence,—and what's the next thing, Vandelia?"

"I should think he might do something he would be sorry for."

"Right. Before I finished my studies I fell in love. Foolish enough, you'll think; but that was n't the worst of it. I had the recklessness to propose to the young lady before I had had the least acquaintance with her. Why, Vandelia, I knew you better by the time we had crossed the ocean together—much bet-

ter — than I knew Félicité the day I became engaged to her. What says to that?"

"Well, I should say it was — queer."

"I took it for granted her character was as lovely as her face. Wasn't she Dr. Morazain's daughter? You see, I did n't reflect upon the sort of training she had received from her mother. There are **as** noble women in France, Vandelia, as you can find the whole world over; but Madame Morazain — well, I'd rather be excused from a description. You've seen her and you've seen her daughter. You never told me what you thought of Félicité's looks. Is she passable?"

"O Dr. Zelig, you know she is superb!"

"Glad to hear you say it. I saw you stopping before a picture at the Louvre half an hour the other day. Did it remind you of her?"

"Oh, yes; and I wanted to say so to you at the time, if I had dared."

"Well, and does n't Félicité's every motion suggest harmony and poetry?"

"Certainly. She makes you feel as if all her thoughts must be beautiful and good."

"Just so. You understand it exactly. And you don't much wonder I was captivated by this 'crystal drop of perfectness,'—I, a boy fresh from Yankeedom?"

"No, indeed! I was in love with her myself till I found out —"

"Don't be alarmed, Vandelia. Speak it in plain English — till you found out she *lied*."

"O doctor!"

His face was as severe as it could be, and that is saying enough.

“‘Lie’ is a good, honest Saxon word, Vandelia. Yes, she lies. I discovered that before I had known her six months. I was bewitched by her charms, but I hated her principles; and after that her power could n’t last long. Sometime I think my profession was one means of my cure. A doctor soon learns that beauty is a very transient thing, and not worth worshipping. Don’t you think physicians are a very matter-of-fact set?”

“Are they?”

“So it seems to me; not much moonshine or poetry about them. Well, of course I had never really loved *Félicité*, — how was it possible? — but my boyish fancy might have grown into love if there had been any solid foundation to build upon. As it was, what with her flirtations and her hypocrisy, to say nothing of her shallowness, I actually came to despise her within a year. What are you looking at me so for? Did you suppose I had been her slave all this time?”

“Well, sir, I thought you were engaged to her when you came back to Paris.”

“Yes. How was I to get out of it? We were bound to each other, and I could not withdraw honorably. I was shut in to that very thing, Vandelia, as firmly and surely as the planets are set in their course round the sun.”

“Yes,” said I, shuddering, and thinking of Vic. “An engagement is an awful thing, it seems to me.”

Dr. Zelig laughed.

“It was awful in my case. I would about as lief have been hanged as to come back to Paris last May; but I had put it off as long as decency would permit,

and besides, there was the Du Souchet family needing to be taken care of. Do you remember that evening when Clum showed you the veiled picture?"

"Yes, indeed; and how interested I was!"

"Well, about that time I was in a state of peculiar torture. I had just heard of Mademoiselle Morazain's flirting with her cousin Alphonse Lambert, and had charged her with it, hoping she would have the grace to dismiss me; but what do you think she said?"

"Denied it, I'm sure."

"Yes, and was broken-hearted because I doubted her. She even went to her father with the complaint that I was jealous."

"What a hypocrite!" said I.

"You look very scornful, Vandelia. I don't believe you have any more charity for liars than I have. What if Mademoiselle Morazain *was* in love with M. Lambert? Consider the temptation she had to keep it from her father; consider how angry he would have been; consider —"

"No, I can't consider. She ought to have let you go, Dr. Zelig, or she ought to have been true to you, — one or the other."

"O, but, my friend, you take a narrow view; you can't understand these fine little points. Well, her father laughed at my jealousy. He was my best friend, — God bless him again! — and he assured me his daughter should never marry anybody else."

"What, not if she didn't care for you?"

"Oh, that wouldn't make any difference. French fathers don't think their daughters have any right to views of their own. Besides, this young lady ex-

pressly declared she was deeply attached to me, and Dr. Morazain believed it. Well, what do you want to say now? Seems to me you are very much afraid of asking questions, Vandelia."

"Oh, I've asked a great many, I think."

"But you dare not inquire whether I myself was so stupid as to believe Félicité cared for me?"

"Well, did you believe it?"

"Yes, sometimes. There, did n't I tell you I was a fool? Men are a vain set, Vandelia, as you may have observed."

"I think they are, rather."

"And easily duped by women. Men can't deceive as women can, I verily believe."

"Oh, it's too bad to say that, Dr. Zelig."

"I mean as *some* women can. I make no reference to Aunt Filura and several others, I wish you to understand. Well, to return to Félicité. I was very sorry about that correspondence you had with her, and have been wanting to apologize, but could n't do it without telling the whole story. She saw you the first week you came to Paris, and took a great fancy to your face. She begged for an introduction, but I was resolved not to give it. When her father died, however, and she showed so much genuine grief, I was willing to indulge her."

"Was she the one who first proposed the correspondence?"

"Certainly. She always had a passion for letter-writing."

"But why did n't you give me her true name?"

"Simply because Françoise was distasteful to me,

and I chose that you should not hear it. I did my best to keep you apart."

"Thank you. But how did you get out of the bog? I want to know that."

"Jumped out."

"Oh!"

"Yes; after watching Félicité narrowly, I decided about two months ago that I was a greater fool for staying in than I had been for getting in. Félicité did n't care two straws for me, I became convinced of that; so then I went to madame and asked to be released from the engagement."

"What *did* she say, that courtly lady?"

"Well, there was no scene, but the acting was good. Madame would n't admit for a moment that her daughter had ever thought of marrying anybody else; but I remarked that at any rate she would never marry me, after which polite statement I bowed and withdrew."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Are you? So am I. It is a thousand times too good for me, but I'm trying to deserve my luck. Don't you think I've improved a little this winter?"

"Yes, sir, I do. But is Félicité engaged to M. Lambert?"

"I have never heard so as yet."

"She wrote me about that man, Dr. Zélie, and wished me to tell you he was only a friend."

"Yes, I saw she was trying to draw you into her snare, but was pretty sure she would n't succeed, if you were the sort of girl I took you to be. There, I've told you the whole story now, and I'm glad it's over with. *Exit Félicité.*"

Strange how I carried a double thread in my mind all the while he was talking,—his story and Vic's braided together! "Engagements are not always fatal" was the moral I drew, with something like a sigh of relief.

"Now will you go into the parlor, Vandelia?" And I hardened my heart against my twin-sister, who was crying up-stairs, and went in.

CHAPTER XXI.

VIC'S STORY.

DEAD LOW TIDE.

I'M sick and tired of this story, and never should finish it if it was n't for Van. We led a wretched life for weeks and weeks after she came back from Lyons. She was dreadfully angry with me, and though she did n't say much, her face spoke condemnation in every line. I say it's dreadful to be so genuine,—dreadful for one's friends. Van can't even smile unless she means it.

She made me feel as if I was under a ban, and I could n't endure it. Who appointed her judge and jury over me? If she had taken the trouble to observe it, there *were* people in Paris who considered me an ornament to my sex.

Then it was that I began to flirt with Mr. Theobold; it is useless to deny it, I did flirt with him, and with Clum too. Oh, it was heathen darkness in my soul in those days! You'd rather not hear of it. I did n't get on well in French, I did n't get on well in practising. When I was examined with the other girls by the committee from the Conservatory of Music, I felt that I failed.

In the mean time Helen and Morris had come on from Lyons, spent a month with us, and returned to Rome. Van could be warm to them and cold to me, almost in the same breath.

February was almost gone. Aunt Filura said the heart of the winter was broken. I was glad of it: it had been a disagreeable, hateful winter to me.

It was the Thursday after St. Valentine's, and I was standing at the window, with my hat on, drumming a funeral march on the pane, while the girl who took care of me strove with her ribbons and furbelows. It was high time we were on our way to the Du Souchets', but dressing was always one long agony to Van.

"Well, Miss Vanity, *are* you ready, or shall we wait — till after supper?"

"I'll be ready in a jiffy, Vic. Don't be cross."

"Cross? Why, I'm as amiable as a sugar-loaf, only I *should* like to get there before Uncle Paoli does. In the words of the extremely be-lover-ed Portia, 'I dote on his very absence!'"

"You never used to dread him so, Vic. Is it because you think he knows of your engagement?"

"He does n't know of it; if he did, they all would: I might as well be published and done with it."

I had changed my mind about mentioning it, you see.

"Well, why should n't they know it? It's the truth."

"All truth is n't necessarily edifying, my dear. What do they care whether your humble sister happens to be engaged or not? Besides, Lucius Ulmer won't be back for months yet. Suppose I'm going to play the bereaved widow while he 'sails the seas over'?"

Van turned to me from the glass with a pin in her mouth. She looked about ninety-five. "Vic," said she, solemnly, "you don't act a bit bereaved. I never shall believe you're in love with Mr. Ulmer."

"Why, I would modestly inquire? Do you expect me to prove it by chapter and verse?"

"No; but I never thought you fancied him any more than I did, Vic."

"I don't know that you ought to fancy Mr. Ulmer."

"But it seems to me, love is a sort of relationship," said Van, coloring a little. "I should n't have thought you were related to Mr. Ulmer, he is so different from you."

"Say connected then," retorted I, glibly. "You may have heard of the ties of affection?"

"Yes; but those make dreadful hard knots, Vic, when the wrong people are tied together."

"Indeed, sister Vandelia! How often have you been married, ma'am?"

"Especially when the affection is all on one side," continued Van, drawing on her gloves with an air of severity. "You made up your mind in altogether too much of a hurry, Vic."

"Note the advantage of having a small mind, my blessing; I can make it up quicker. That reminds me that people so slow as you ought to live longer; I wonder if they do?"

"I wouldn't live a day longer without breaking my engagement, if I were you, I know that," said Van, with pouncing emphasis. "I would n't be engaged to a man and be ashamed to own it."

"Of course, Miss Asbury, you'd do exactly right

under all circumstances. You're a perfect model. I'm not, and don't aspire to be; I always said I'd as lief be a warning as an example."

Van walked off on her dignity, and I'm ashamed to say we went in Indian file half the way to the Du Souchets'.

Oddly enough, the subject of matrimony came up again that evening when we were waiting tea for Dr. Zelie. One of Henriette's friends was about to marry a gentleman three times her age, and Henriette had received an invitation to the wedding.

"It's a downright shame for such a pretty girl to pick up that fossil," said Clum, whirling round on the piano-stool.

"Strange she should love him," remarked simple Van.

Clum wrinkled his eyebrows,—a habit of his. "I never heard her accused of loving him, Van. She'd have too much taste. Her parents arranged the marriage."

"But M. Cyr adores *her*, Clum," said Henriette. "Everybody says that."

"H'm! How long can he keep up that sort of thing, I wonder? A fellow must be a spooney to worship forever at an altar he can't kindle a flame upon."

"Oh, he isn't dead sure he can't kindle one, I suppose," said I; "besides, there's the chance of spontaneous combustion."

"What's the topic? Pyrotechnics?" said Dr. Zelie, close behind me. He had slouched in unobserved as usual. He wore list shoes in the house.

"Matrimonial fires, nothing less, Uncle Zeke," said

Clum, with a solemn air. "Vic thinks they can be set after marriage."

"And what does Van say?"

"I have n't made it a subject of thought," said she, demurely; "but I should n't want to run any risk. A body *can* live single, you know."

"Live single?" retorted I. "Yes, of course you can. You can live with one lung and no brain."

Van could n't make the simplest remark, but I suspected it was a home-thrust.

"You buzz so I can't make out a quarter of what you say," said Uncle Paoli from his corner, chidingly; "but as I take it, you're talking about that little girl that's going to marry M. Cyr. He's a forehanded man, according to what I heard yesterday, and she's doing well for herself."

"I only hope she won't weary in well-doing," remarked Dr. Zelie, dryly; and began to talk about the weather. I fancy engagements were a sore subject to him as well as with myself.

"Victoria," said he, leaning over my shoulder, "I called round at Madame Rey's to-night to see my patient; and they gave me a letter for you that came after you left this afternoon."

I reached out my hand with a secret tremor, thinking the letter might be from Mr. Ulmer; but I saw in a moment it was from Mate Willard, and bore the Quinebasset postmark.

"There, read it in peace, Victoria, and I'll try to keep these girls quiet."

With that Dr. Zelie walked across to the sofa, and threw himself down, with his head in Clarice's lap, and

began to talk nonsense. He was in one of his boyish moods to-night. So was Clum; but then Clum always was. As I broke open the envelope he whirled back again to the piano, to sing "I writ my love a letter," in a languishing-lady voice, with operatic variations. I didn't think of it then, but afterwards I remembered what a happy group we were. Even Uncle Paoli looked contented as he sat winking at the fire, with his feet elevated on a box-cricket Aunt Filura had covered with broadcloth expressly for him. She, dear soul! was fluttering about the chimney like a swallow, winging the hearth furtively here and there, but not daring to give it a thorough sweeping for fear of making Uncle Paoli "feel he was in the way."

My letter was in two sheets, one written three weeks before and by mistake not mailed,—just like Mate's heedlessness,—the other added a week later. I happened to take up the last first.

Next moment I rushed wildly across the room, letter in hand, and flung myself into Van's arms. "Little Morris! O Van! why can't we die too?"

"Not dead! Little Morris is n't dead? Do speak, Vic!"

But I could only sob and rave like a maniac. Van thrust the letter into Clum's hand. "Read it," said she, "I can't."

"O Vic," it ran, "I've opened this letter to tell you something dreadful. I can't bear to write it; but then I'm sure you ought to be prepared, and your mother may forget, she's so anxious about little Morris. He has scarlet fever, dear little fellow! the real malignant kind. I saw him yesterday. We've all had it at our

house, you know. Dr. Prescott was there (he goes several times a day to see him), and I heard him tell your mother he had n't much encouragement to give, but while there was life there was hope.

"So don't give him up, Vic dear. He *may* get well. It breaks my heart to think of you and Van so far off at this dreadful time. The minister prayed for all your family last week."

"Then little Morris is dead. I know he's dead. You don't pray for folks in church till they're most gone," thought I; and I dare say I said it, though I've no idea what words I spoke, only of the thoughts that surged through my brain. "Oh dear! and he was such a sweet little fellow; and mother was bringing him up so beautifully, and teaching him to be chivalrous to his sisters and gentle to everybody. And what use was it? I wish he'd been a horrid, ugly, hateful little wretch, for then he'd have been sure to live,—why don't you say something, Van? He's all the brother we have, and we have n't him either. What are you looking at me so for, Van? Go away, Dr. Zelig! Go away, Columbus! I'm not hystericky, I'm as calm as a meeting-house. Little Morris is dead,—that's all; but it's no matter! Do let me alone!"

And then I seemed to lose the run of things for a while, till I heard Dr. Zelig say, "She is coming out of it, Vandelia. Don't be alarmed, it's only a nervous spasm."

Then I sat up on the floor and found Clum chafing my hands, and Van holding a *vinaigrette* to my nose, while Aunt Filura fanned me with the goose-wing that she'd been using about the hearth; next Tantra Bogus

squeezed in between Clum and Aunt Filura to lick my face, and I went off in a laughing fit, and nobody spoke to me, but Van stroked my head gently, and by and by I grew calmer and began to cry, and everybody looked relieved. Dr. Zelig was pacing restlessly up and down the room.

"Is that Willard girl an idiot, Vandelia?" said he, angrily. "It's unpardonable, her putting you in this suspense when your mother spared you."

"Scarlet fever is a terrible complaint, — terrible. I know how to feel for the twins," said Uncle Paoli, dolorously. "It carried off my two boys, — strong, healthy little chaps as ever you see. They went within a couple of days of each other. Wa'n't sick upwards of a week."

"And then again, children at death's door rally," said the doctor, impatiently. "Don't take the letter so to heart, girls. The case may not be half as dark as it appears. What did that Mate Willard know about it, — a sentimental school-girl, without judgment or common-sense?"

It seemed a positive relief to him to hurl indignant epithets at Mate, and I think it was a relief to me to hear him. In affliction one naturally wants to blame somebody.

Just then Aunt Filura, who had left the room, bustled back, with her cap awry, bringing a pitcher of egg-nog. Her sympathies always took a practical turn. "Do try to drink some, Victoria," said she. "It's most an excellent thing where the nerves are unstrung."

I tried to please her, but could n't swallow. Van

did a little better, and returned her glass, saying we must go home.

"Not till after tea. You haven't had your tea," said Clum, looking distressed; but Van repeated that we must go home, and nobody said any more. Clarice brought our things, and she and Henriette wrapped us in them as if we had been marble statues. Van looked like one. Aunt Filura slipped some cakes in our pockets, saying we might be faint in the night; and then we were walking down the path with Dr. Zelig and Clum, without having made our adieux. I recollect that omission particularly, because Uncle Paoli was "hurt."

Clum went with me, and he hardly spoke till we reached Madame Rey's. I think he didn't dare, for fear he couldn't command his voice. He was just so tender-hearted always, and I felt very grateful to him that night for his silent sympathy.

"O Van, Van," said I, with a fresh burst of tears, as I tore off my cherry ribbons before the glass, "to think of my wearing gay colors to-day, when little Morris may be dead and buried!"

"And to think of being in this suspense till another mail!" said Van, catching her breath. "It *is* hard, Vic, but we must bear it as well as we can."

How slowly the hours passed that night! It seemed as if time itself was running down. But after a great while it was morning, and by and by it had dragged along to afternoon, and we were moping in our room, doing nothing in particular, — nothing seemed worth the doing now, — when we were sent for to see Dr. Zelig.

"Why, it's office hours," said Van, with a faint glow

of animation. "Suppose he has come just to express his sympathy?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said I, dismally; but I went down with Van nevertheless. Any change was preferable to this dull monotony.

Dr. Zelig was standing with his hands behind him, looking out of the window; but as we entered he came towards us with such a joyful look that I darted forward and seized his arm.

"Little Morris is better, and you've come to tell us!"

"But another steamer can't have arrived," said Van, "O no."

I was trembling from head to foot. Dr. Zelig took both my hands in his right, and with his left stroked my hair as Van had done the night before, looking down at me as he would have looked at Tantra Bogus in affliction.

"Poor child, poor child! Can you bear a piece of good news, do you think?"

"Yes, sir, oh yes! Tell me this minute!"

"Your little brother *is* better. Do you hear me, Victoria? Out of danger, I should judge."

"You've dreamed it," cried Van. "You say it to comfort us, Dr. Zelig. You can't know."

"Why, Vandelia, you little doubting Thomas! do you suppose I'd deceive you in such a grave matter? I have just received a despatch from your mother in answer to one I sent this morning. Here it is: 'Baby better; crisis past.'"

"O Dr. Zelig, you blessed, blessed man! there never was anybody so good as you," I cried wildly, and Van declared I threw both arms round his neck; but I haven't the most shadowy recollection of it.

"Only passable," said he, trying to be gruff. "I had a spite against your idiotic correspondent, and wanted to prove her in the wrong, that's all."

"Oh, it's heavenly, heavenly! It's as if you'd lifted Bunker Hill off of us. We never thought of telegraphing; queer, but we did n't."

"I doubted myself, Victoria, whether we could get an answer so promptly from your far-off little village; and that was why I did n't tell you last night that I meant to despatch."

"Oh, it was angel-good of you to do it, Dr. Zelig. We're no end grateful,—no end!"

"There, there, child, that'll do. You're extravagant," laughed he; yet I knew he liked it nevertheless. The man is n't born who does n't like to be fully appreciated, and I wondered Van had n't said anything, till I saw how white she was,—too weak, I suppose, to speak.

CHAPTER XXII.

VAN'S STORY.

EVANGELINE.

“ God hath released her.”

YES, it was dear of Dr. Zelie to do that. If I had not felt the kindness so much, perhaps I could have thanked him better. Mate's thoughtlessness would have proved a terrible thing to us ; for our next home letter was delayed, and we did not hear for two weeks.

How much needless suffering there is in the world ! In spite of Dr. Zelie's best efforts, we had spent a day and a night of exquisite torture, — “ all for nothing,” Vic said ; but I think not quite, for one good came out of the evil : my heart softened towards Vic. I had been treating her shamefully, and I saw it when we were in that deep place together.

“ Vic,” said I, “ I have some of Aunt Marian's blood in my veins ; I'm a natural tyrant. Forgive me for interfering about Mr. Ulmer. You shall marry the Pope of Rome if you want to — only let us be friends again ”

“ The pope is n't a marrying man,” said Vic, bursting out crying ; and then we fell into each others arms like the “ long-lost brothers ” in the burlesque, and made it all up, only Vic destroyed the solemnity of the scene

by asking, "And will you resume the curtain lectures at the usual time to-night?"

Little witch! While I was so angry with her, the scoldings had been indefinitely postponed. I had maintained, for the most part, a dignified silence. "I *am* a prig," said I. I wanted to add that I would stand by her, come what might, for I had a foreboding that she would need me. I could n't believe that she and Lucius Ulmer were ever intended to travel the same road: she was only tripping along a little by-path with him now, but when it came to the real highway they would part company; and I dreaded it. Whether such a thought ever came into her head, I don't know; she would not allow herself to reflect at all, since her engagement, but rushed from one thing to another as fast as she could go.

I did n't mean to be priggish, but after we made up I could n't help preaching against the sin of an engaged girl's flirting. I wished she would n't be so free and easy with Clum and Mr. Theobald.

"Why don't you throw in Dr. Zelig while you are about it, Van, — just for a change?"

"For the simple reason that you can't flirt with him. A man that has been through what he has will keep clear of love-affairs, you may depend."

"Yum! yum!" said Vic, laughing, and ran down to her music.

Before Helen and Morris left we had talked of our plans for the summer. They two were to make the tour of Europe, and had invited us to go with them, but we had not decided how much of the invitation to accept. We should leave Madame Rey's in July vaca-

tion, at any rate, and perhaps go as far as Heidelberg, or to "Bing-gun on the Rhine," as Uncle Paoli called it. Vic wanted to make the whole tour, and said I showed a mercenary spirit by objecting. It would be a lovely pleasure to Morris to see his sisters enjoying themselves, and why would I be forever spoiling a good time by thinking about money? She had her little fling at me as usual, but ended by submitting all to my decision. Meanwhile we were working hard, having the Hôtel de Ville always in view. Spring came before we had begun to look for it. We loved to watch the climbing plants on garden walls coming to life; but you may be sure we didn't investigate Félicité's garden wall: like the Levite, we always passed by on the other side.

Mr. Ulmer warned us in his letters not to roam about the city too much. His tone of ownership nettled me, but Vic only laughed at it. She never paid the slightest attention to his advice though, and we went and came as freely as ever.

The weather grew so warm by the first of April that fires were needless; but when we visited the Du Souchets we always found the charcoal lighted in the grate, for the "*sole* reason," as Clum said, "of heating Uncle Paoli's feet. Aunt Filly's doings, you know."

"I've had my suspicions of Uncle Paoli and Aunt Filura all along," remarked Vic to me, "especially of Uncle Paoli."

Julie Papeneau never returned to the Du Souchets. She had been sick all winter, and grew worse as the season advanced. Dr. Zelig attended her, and she was always asking him for "Madame Week and Mademoi-

selle Van, the little white girl" (*la fillette blanche*). So Aunt Filura and I went to see her nearly every day. I shall always remember the walks we took through that unfashionable quarter of Paris, and how pleasantly we talked by the way. We became much attached to Julie, and it was sad to think of her dying and leaving six younger brothers and sisters who all loved and needed her. But nothing of that sort ever depressed Aunt Filura. Death was a familiar thought to her, and had no terrors. Everything was "for some wise and good purpose," even the darkest providences. I think she helped me a good deal by her simple faith, for I was just beginning to puzzle over "free will and foreknowledge absolute," and she had come out of that fog long ago, as every sensible person must.

"You can try to do right and trust God, can't you, Vandelia? Well, I guess that's all that will be required of you. It is n't likely you'll live long enough to settle the doctrine of decrees, and I would n't undertake it."

Julie's Huguenot aunt was very anxious Julie should renounce Popery, but Aunt Filura did n't seem to care much about it. The poor child had no time at the last to send for a priest, but died in Aunt Filura's arms, with a smile of perfect peace on her lips. Madame Soucier, her aunt, mourned her like a mother, and the children were inconsolable.

Dr. Zelig and Clum had been very kind during Julie's illness, and were just as kind afterwards, taking upon themselves all care of the arrangements. Of course, the Du Souchets and we twins attended the funeral. The family lived in an upper floor of a gloomy old tene-

ment in a back alley, but were very glad to have us adorn the rooms with flowers; and when Dr. Zelig procured a piano for the occasion, their gratitude was touching. A little French piano, you must understand, no larger than a melodeon, and as easily moved. I never saw anything of the sort in America.

The family sat in the best room; the rest of us, perhaps twenty-five, in the kitchen. The ceiling was very low, but the floor was as white, and the stove as black, as human hands could make them.

The parlor was a decent room, whose rough walls we had hung with engravings. I had contributed the picture of "Félicité's Home," which I saw Dr. Zelig gaze at with surprise.

Looking into the parlor we could see the children all in black, even to three-years-old Josephine, and all huddled close together taking hold of hands. Before them lay the wasted form of the loved one at rest,—her waxen hands folded, small white flowers about her face, the hard-won peace upon her dark fixed brows.

From the outside, through the open windows, came the noise of street-cries and the rumble of wheels,—sounds of busy life. How strange it seemed! The fragrance of the flowers in the room was like a spell upon me, giving me visions of broad green fields lying in sweet summer serenity, with yellow buttercups and globes of dandelions swaying to the breeze. I don't know why, but the odor of certain flowers always recalls summers of long ago, when Vic and I were children, and our little feet went pattering through the tall grass of Prescott meadow in search of strawberries. It

seemed as if life had been one long summer and we had always lived in it, and for us it would never cease ; yet here was this tired Julie, who had left it all and gone — ah ! whither had she gone ? The friends sat weeping around her ; but was she far away, beyond the stars ? How do we know ? Julie herself had believed she should be “ allowed to see the children,” and that had made the parting easier for her.

“ I am the resurrection and the life,” repeated the French preacher, a good old Huguenot, with white hair and sad black eyes ; but I hardly heard anything more for my own thoughts.

Dr. Zelig sat beside me, grave and reverent. He looked sinewy and full of life, as if there could be no question about his ever dropping his body as old and useless, for it could not possibly wear out. And here was this young girl, just my age, who had been given, in the first place, only *physique* enough to hold her spirit. What a contrast ! Dr. Zelig had an armor of strength in which to fight the battle of life, but poor little Julie had had none, and she had fallen by the way. Just so I too might have fallen, with her foes to encounter, — poverty and hard work.

Unfortunate little servant-maid ! I felt very sorry for her, almost as if she had not been fairly dealt with. Her life had been too hard, and dying so young she had missed many of the good and beautiful things of this world. But surely they would be made up to her in the country where she had gone ! Is anything impossible with God ? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?

That relieved me. The earth side of the question

did look dark, and the only way to get any light upon it was to turn it round towards heaven.

All the while we sat there listening to the prayer, and all the while we sang to Vic's playing,—solemn dirges, such as we never heard before—the sky had been growing dark. The services were over, the family had taken leave of Julie with loud crying, and then, Dr. Zelie leading the way, the rest of us went in and dropped a flower on her bosom for good-by.

After that it was time to start for the cemetery, and half a dozen carriages stood waiting outside; but it began to pour. It was one of those fierce showers that you think must spend its fury in a few minutes; but it kept on and on. The rain rushed against the hinged, ill-fitting windows, came down through the ceiling, crept in little pools under the stove; and there sat those mourning souls in the parlor beside themselves with grief. It was hard to wait there with the coffin-lid closed and think such long thoughts. We all pitied them so.

Great drops of rain began to drip upon the piano, and Dr. Zelie and Clum sprang up and moved it to the other side of the kitchen. Upon that the Papeneau children fairly screamed out. They had lost all self-control, and their aunt was as bad.

I wished the good preacher would go in to them, but he sat with the rest of us, stroking his white beard and looking sympathetic. I suppose he really did not know what to do.

Presently Dr. Zelie leaned forward and whispered to me, “Evangeline, don't you think you could go in and comfort those children?”

I remembered afterwards his calling me Evangeline.

"I, sir? You don't mean me?"

"Yes, just you. Go right in, child."

"But I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything, then. Just go in."

It seemed presumptuous. What good could I do? It ought to be Aunt Filura.

"Go in," said Dr. Zelie again; and there was so much propelling force in his eye that I arose and went.

There were the children crowded together, all six of them, cheek to cheek, weeping and trembling. Could I, who had just "taken heart of God's almightiness," think of any words of comfort for them? I knelt down, took the hand of Marie, the eldest, and just repeated in French the simple lines I had translated for Julie, —

"I shall look into your faces,
And listen to what you say,
And be often very near you,
When you think I'm far away."

"She believed that, children," said I, "and how do we know but it is true? She loves you so well that perhaps she is lingering here awhile before she goes to heaven."

The cries hushed while I was speaking, and they all looked at me earnestly; but the aunt seemed a little shocked.

"And if Julie is here, children, how sorry she will be to see you so wretched."

"Ah, mademoiselle," said the aunt, "nothing can make the angels unhappy."

"What, not even sorry just for a few moments, madame, when they first leave their friends?"

"No. God wipes away all tears from their eyes," replied Madame Socier, burying her face in her handkerchief.

"Yes, I know; and so you think Julie can never be even the least vexed or sorrowful any more, forever and ever?"

"Oh, I am certain of it."

"How beautiful that is! I had not understood it like that; but if it is really true, how glad we ought to be, how very, very glad for Julie!"

The sobs began again, but low and quiet, without the wild, distressing wail.

"Oh, you see," said Marie, "we must cry after all; we want her back so much."

"Yes, I know. Julie was a dear girl; but you wouldn't have her come back to that tired body? Why, just think of it: she has thrown it away; it was full of pain. Tell me, Marie, now *would* you have her take it up if she could? Children, would *you*?"

In their excited state they were easily moved from one extreme to another, and they all responded, "No, we don't want Julie here to suffer."

I had been so afraid of saying the wrong thing; but it proved to be the right one, by no skill of mine.

"Oh, stay with us!" exclaimed Marie, as I rose to leave. "Don't go till the storm is over."

So I stayed and talked; and when the sun came out, which it did in about half an hour, they entered the carriages calmly, and we all rode to Père la Chaise decently and in order.

"Van," said Vic, as we rode along, "I begin to see where your talent lies; you ought to be a preacher. What did you say to those poor little things?"

"Oh, I don't half remember. I only talked to them right out of my heart, just as I felt, you know."

"Victoria," said Dr. Zelig, abruptly, "why was your sister called Vandelia? She was introduced to me as Miss Van, and I thought for a long while her name was Evangeline, as it ought to be."

"Evangeline is a great deal prettier," said Vic. "The only objection is, you can't 'spell it with a 'wee,'" as Mr. Weller says; and do you suppose I'd have my twin sister's name begin with any other letter?"

But after that Dr. Zelig almost always called me Evangeline, and I liked it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VIC'S STORY.

HEIDELBERG.

YOU don't know how strangely I felt at that funeral; for Van certainly did look like an angel, — I could n't keep my eyes away from her; and the fancy came over me that we had separated, — that she was the spirit, and I was the body she had left behind her. An animated, perverse, unaccountable body, though!

Well, the months rolled round to July. Arrangements had been made for us to spend the rest of the summer at Heidelberg; and one morning, after a good deal of hurrying and scurrying, and an extravagant number of kisses from Madame Rey, Van and I set out on our trip with Morris and Helen.

While we were at the depot, getting under weigh, literally as well as figuratively, — for in Europe they actually do weigh your baggage, — Clum Du Souchet rushed in. We had bidden him good-by the night before, but it seemed he wouldn't stay bidden. He stood in the doorway a moment, looking about him, and then crossed doubtfully towards our window, where Van and I were mounting guard with Helen over the shawl-straps.

"So absurd of him not to wear spectacles, Van,"

whispered I, waving my lunch-basket at him. "You observe he's nowise certain whether we are ourselves or the three harpies."

But the lunch-basket decided him, and he hurried up to shake hands.

"I thought I'd look in a moment to wish you *bon voyage*," said he, red in the face as the sun in a drought.

"That's kind of you," responded Van and Helen, which was quite politeness enough for one family, and I did n't add anything.

"I wish you were going too," went on Van, sweetly. "Have you any messages for the Theobolds? We shall see them in Heidelberg, I suppose."

"My regards."

But he need n't have flung them like stones from a sling, nor looked so severe about it.

"Well, and what shall we bring you from the fatherland, Clum?" said I. "A lovely set of cross-bones? or shall we cabbage some sauer-kraut for you?"

"Consult your own taste," said he, more amiably, going up to Van, looking at her wistfully, then coming round to my side.

Clum stood a little in awe of my better half, but was generally easy enough with me.

"By the way, Vic," said he, "have you any bonbons to go with your lunch? Haven't? Well, let's get some, as long as Uncle Zeke is n't here to cry out in the name of the profession. Oh, here he comes, though. Why, Uncle Zeke, I thought you could n't be spared."

With that he walked me off towards a confectionery stand.

"Look here, Vic," stammered he the minute we were beyond hearing, and there he stuck fast. Whereupon I did look, though that wasn't what he meant at all; he was staring blankly at the toe of his boot. "Say, Vic," he began again, fencing me into a corner, "you might tell a fellow that much. I tried to ask you last night, but there was always somebody round. Is this true that Henriette says about you?"

"What? something awful? There's Morris with our tickets, Clum. We must scamper for our seats."

"About an engagement—Vic, Henriette says—"

"Well, Henriette knows, I suppose"

Somehow the least allusion to Mr. Ulmer vexed me. I should marry him some time, of course, but meanwhile there was no need of making a stir. I did hate to be talked over outside the family. Clum had turned his back to me, apparently to study a cobweb on the wall.

"Then it *is* true, Vic. Mr. Theobold *is* engaged to —you or Van?"

"To you or Van," was spoken just above a whisper. I hardly stopped to think of the absurdity of his dragging Van into my love-affairs. My heart gave a bound, though a minute before I'd felt as weak as a day-old kitten.

"Bless you, no, Clum, — the idea! Henriette must be crazy! Hark, there's the bell. We must run, or I shall be left"

Morris was shouting to me from the platform, the girls were beckoning wildly from the car-window. I had only time to shake hands and tumble helter-skelter up the steps before the train began to move.

"Seems to me he looks very cheerful at our departure," remarked Van, making room for me; "but where are the bonbons?"

"Bonbons? What bonbons?"

"Why, those you and Clum went to buy. Of course you'll treat us."

"Why, we did n't get any," said I.

"Oh!" said Van, looking at Helen, who looked at Morris, who looked at me laughing.

"Quite proper that you should n't get any under the circumstances, little sister," said he, in his droll way. "Still, knowing your sweet tooth, I don't think Mr. Ulmer *would* have objected."

"Well, but there was n't time to telegraph and find out, you know," said I, saucily; and I supposed that ended the subject.

We had a quiet day of it, we four in a compartment by ourselves; and we might have had a quiet night, if it had not been for those officers of custom, who were consumed with a desire to know what we had in our hand-bags. Some time in the small hours we were invited out to see them, and as I woke I met Van's big eyes fixed on me. She said she had not been asleep at all, which seemed incredible till I discovered why: she had *me* on her mind.

"Vic," whispered she in my ear, after the men had attended to their duties and we had filed back again into the car, "did you tell Clum about Mr. Ulmer? I really think you ought."

"Why, Van Asbury, for mercy's sake go to sleep!" said I, wrapping my shawl about me for another nap.

"Why should I tell Clum? Do you want me boasting

of my offers, like Miss O'Neil? I'm no sich a person, Sairey Gamp."

In the morning we reached Cologne, and of course we visited the cathedral because it was the proper thing to do, though I must say cathedrals were getting to be a weariness to the flesh. The peculiarity about this one is that it is crumbling in some places and unfinished in others. Then we took the train again for Coblentz, where we were to strike the Rhine.

Two thirds of the way the scenery was delightful, the other third it was n't, unless you're fond of pitch-darkness; for we were shooting through tunnels, and mountains are not particularly sublime, taking an inside view.

But when we came to the grand old river at last, and were actually on board the steamer, puffing up the Rhine, then you should have seen Van's face. Her eyes opened wider and wider at every castle and ruin we passed, till it seemed as if her soul had climbed up behind them to peep out. As for me, I opened my *mouth*,—a satisfaction to myself, though nobody appeared to mind what I said.

By and by we came to the Lorelei, and Morris told as the legend about it: how a beautiful maiden, with a star on her forehead and a harp in her hand, used to sit upon that rock singing so divinely that the sailors, hearing her, would forget to row, and be dashed to pieces upon the crags at her feet. I remarked that she must have had a "killing voice," which disgusted poetical old Van, who dotes on misty legends.

"Well, that rock is a good foundation for a story, any way," said I; "it's as big as three meeting-houses.

But, Van, do you realize what we little Quinnebasset girls are coming to?"

"Not to grief, I hope."

"To Bing-gun on the Rhine, Vandeely."

"Vic," said Helen, "Uncle Paoli *didn't* say 'Bing-gun,' honestly and truly?"

"Yes, but he did. Does n't he call things awful names, though? I should think he'd be afraid they'd appear to him."

But dear me! I shall never get us landed at Heidelberg at this rate. We arrived at that city in due season; and Morris and Helen saw us comfortably established there before they went on to travel in Switzerland. We were in a quaint old house that climbed up the mountain behind it, — like a kangaroo, shortest legs in front. On the side facing the mountain, it was one story high, and it was five stories on the other. We had our rooms in the upper one, but the entrance was from the mountain side, and we had the advantages of attic and first floor combined.

Fräulein Zipp, our landlady, was a well-educated maiden lady, getting along towards the sere and yellow leaf, and she copied after nature in putting on "the fantastic mourning of autumn." She used to bring us our coffee and rolls every morning, and ask us invariably if we had slept well, — the refinement of cruelty, I told Van, when she'd made us work all night like sleight-of-hand performers, balancing her down-beds. However, it was much of the time too warm for those.

After breakfast we usually took a stroll about the city, and came home to find our sitting-room and bed-

room swept and garnished. We would get out our books then, and plunge into German, though I must say it was rather deep water for me, and I did n't object to paddling out of it now and then to have an English breathing-spell with the Theobolds, who used to run in frequently on their way home from their walks. They walked a great deal in the open air, to strengthen their lungs, I believe; but they always went home before our dinner came, which was sent in from a hotel.

And after dinner and a little more studying, we went three times a week to our recitations, where we met the Theobolds again, and perhaps joined them in a little expedition before we returned to our supper.

Ah! that was the most ecstatic meal of the day, for we prepared it ourselves over our shiny little stove. First we would build a fire of wood and cakes of dried turf; then fill the copper tea-kettle,—it held just a pint,—and we were ready for action.

Sometimes we would content ourselves with black bread and butter, and coffee and fruit; but oftener we would n't. We liked to try experiments in cookery.

"Van," said I one night, as I was poaching eggs in our baby saucepan, "I've got an inspiration: we'll have a tea-party, and invite the Theobolds."

"But the table, Vic? it is n't half big enough."

"Well, haven't we a trunk for a sideboard, my blessing? Oh, we can manage."

"It would be fun, but I wonder if we ought to; it would interrupt our German, you know. And then Miss Theobold is so precise; do you suppose she'd like a gypsy-tea?"

"Immensely. I'll make her unbend, you'll see."

"Well," said Van, "let's ask them for to-morrow; it is n't recitation day."

Accordingly in the morning we sallied out bright and early to market. We always enjoyed going and seeing the great crowd of bare-headed peasant women, surrounded by their wares of vegetables and poultry and everything else that is edible, besides a great deal that is not. For some mysterious reason they seemed particularly bent on selling live hens and geese to Van and myself; and that morning one of them insisted on our buying a whole deer with the skin on. I shook my head at her indignantly.

"We may be spendthrifts. Van," said I. "but we won't be gluttons."

And thereupon we made a modest purchase of beef-steak and potatoes, filling our basket with the most delicious plums of various kinds. Van suggested sauer-kraut; but after getting a warning whiff, I stood firm.

"Never," said I, "will we offer up such incense at any feast of ours. Noses forbid."

It takes too long to tell it all: how we bought the last teaspoonful of soda in Heidelberg, whose price nearly ruined us; and how the druggist who sold it insisted on palming off his old English upon us. As if we had n't come to Heidelberg and were n't spending money on purpose to learn to talk German! But that was the way half the shopkeepers did. Then we bought sugar and flour and spices, and went home and mixed cookies in the saucepan, rolled them on a tin box-cover with a round bottle, and cut them out with Van's silver drinking-cup. We baked them first on

one side and then on the other, like flapjacks, in the little oven that would n't heat on top ; but they were delectable.

The Theobolds came, of course ; they would n't have missed of it ; and they went into raptures over the steak, which was n't so very smoky after all. I knew they would appreciate flesh-and-blood meat, after seeing only the ghost of it for so long in the soups they ate at their German boarding-house.

I played the host, and Van presided over the coffee-pot with such charming grace that Mr. Theobold was beguiled into a third cup ; and still the coffee held out. And so did the delicious black bread, hot from the baker's,—unwholesome of course, like good things generally, but a rarity, for the natives never eat bread till it is stale. And after we had hustled the tea-things into Fräulein Zipp's kitchen, out of sight, we had music,—such music ! The Theobolds gave us some of their loveliest duets, and they did sing them divinely.

"I've had an enchanting time," Miss Theobold said when they went away. "I've enjoyed every moment, and I think Edward can say the same."

She was several years older than he, and had a way of "making his manners" for him occasionally, as if she was his grandmother.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Theobold, heartily. "And now you must let us be entertainers in turn. Won't you go with us to visit Heidelberg Castle day after tomorrow ? I have engaged a guide."

Taking pattern from Miss Theobold, I spoke up for my relative, and said we'd be "on velvet" to go, or words to that effect.

"Van, my beloved, he's angelic," said I, waltzing her back into our sitting-room after seeing the Theobolds to the door. "Observe what comes of a little politeness well-directed. By means of our hospitality we've got invited to the castle."

But Van did n't look hilarious. She put on the dish-water to heat with an air of awful responsibility, and wiped the tea-things afterwards in the deepest meditation, while I lighted the lamp, and sat down to write my semi-weekly letter to Mr. Ulmer. Presently I found out what the matter was. "Did Mr. Theobold know of my engagement? Ought n't I to tell him?"

"Van Asbury," said I, "you have engagement on the brain. Of what earthly interest are our private affairs to the Theobolds?"

"But, Vic, Mr. Theobold has taken a great fancy to you; you don't know how he looked at you when you were talking to his sister."

"Did he? Well, I hope I presented a respectable appearance. Oh, I forgot to tell you Clum thought he was engaged to *me or Van*; so his attentions to me can't be very decided."

"What in the world do you mean, Vic?"

"Don't talk to me, please; I'm writing."

At the middle of my second page ideas were running low. I did wonder secretly why Mr. Ulmer wanted to be pelted continually with my letters. I should have been satisfied with half as many from him; but then men were queer beings, and besides it *was* dull for him waiting there in Alexandria. He had intended to sail for Europe a month before, but Mr. Peters had fallen ill again. I did not expect to see Mr. Ulmer

before I returned to Paris in September; and how should I feel when I did see him? I would n't think; my motto all along had been, "Let sleeping dogs lie."

On the afternoon appointed, the Theobolds called for us to visit the ruined castle, and I am afraid I set out bent on being a little wicked, just to tease Van, who watched over me like a hen over her only chicken.

It was a fine day, and we met a great many people. There were broad-faced nurse-girls carrying little dots of babies strapped upon pillows with bright ribbons. And there were other babies, not so very much larger, with ear-rings, and their hair braided in little flaxen tails. And then there were university students, who were not babies, but wore white cashmere baby-caps. They were scarred like veterans, and I asked Mr. Theobold what had battered them up so, — not that I had n't a suspicion, but young men like an opportunity to impart information.

"Duelling, Miss Vic. It is their favorite occupation, and they are very proud of their scars."

We were walking together, Miss Theobold having dropped behind to talk with Van. She thought a great deal of that child; all women did. We strolled through lovely chestnut woods, full of nuts, and of printed notices that you must n't pick them; and came to the castle park, where a band was playing. Here we rested a while, and then we passed on to the castle, which I think was the finest we had visited. It ought to have been fine; it was six centuries in building, though, looking at the massive walls twenty feet thick in some parts, and at the elaborately carved front, you wondered that it should have been completed in any number of ages.

We entered the vast cellars, and saw the famous wine-tun that holds fifty thousand gallons, they say, and has been filled three times. We had to climb a whole flight of stairs to reach the top of it, which was large enough for a parlor floor.

Afterwards we ascended heavenwards to get a view from the highest turret; but Miss Theobold and Van grew dizzy half way up, and sat down on the stairs.

Was I going to sit down too, when I was n't dizzy in the least? Of course not. I kept on with Mr. Theobold till we stood on the tiptop pinnacle, and there we stayed a long time, looking at Heidelberg and the river Neckar and the clouds, and picking sprays of coliseum ivy.

Why not? It was exciting and Mr. Theobold was entertaining; and above all it was a delightful place to sing.

Now I wish to make the remark right here, that I do think it is rather dangerous for a young gentleman and lady to sing together too much. It brings them intimately acquainted, and interests them in each other, when otherwise they might have been merely cool acquaintances.

Mr. Ulmer couldn't sing a note, did n't even enjoy music; whereas Mr. Theobold's voice was delicious. How could I help liking to sing with him? And if I sometimes forgot I was engaged,—just by letter, you know, to a man in Egypt,—can you think it was so very strange?

And then Mr. Theobold was so modest and sensitive; he never presumed in the least. If he had said anything sentimental, I should have taken fright in a

moment; but he never did,—never till that night on the pinnacle; and then he spoke about going to Stuttgart to-morrow, and about seeing me here when he came back; and would I miss him? And could we ever be more than friends? etc. etc. It came upon me like a shock; but I thought the best way was to turn it off with a laugh, so I made believe it was all nonsense. I would n't be serious a moment. What I said I don't remember; but it struck me afterwards that I spoke of finishing the conversation some other time.

"Oh, do let's hurry back!" said I. "Both our sisters are suffering terrors on our account."

So we went down to them, ever so far below the battlements, and found them in agonies, Miss Theobold scolding, and Van as white as a pond-lily from sheer fright, expecting every instant to hear the sound of our lifeless bodies striking the ground.

But there was another feeling with religious, high-principled Van, that outlasted the fright. After the Theobolds had left us at Fräulein Zipp's, she turned to me in the doorway, with a meeting-house face.

"I know you don't mean any harm, Vic dear," said she, resting her chin on my shoulder; "but do you think Mr. Ulmer would like this?"

"Like what?" said I, darting across the hall to Fräulein Zipp, who had come out of her parlor to meet us, her face beaming like a host of cherubim.

"Der Herr called, Fräulein Victoria to see," said she in her crazy English. "I say you home not are. *He* say, I her return will wait." With that she handed me a card. It was Mr. Ulmer's!

CHAPTER XXIV.

VAN'S STORY.

SPECIAL PLEADING.

VIC says I may go on with the rest of the story • she is ashamed of herself, but it ought to be told.

The moment Miss Zipp had turned away, she seized me by the shoulders and said, "I can't go in! O Van, I can't see him!"

I was very much astonished.

"But you must go in," said I, drawing her into our sleeping-room by the door leading from the hall. We usually went the other way, through the sitting-room; but Mr. Ulmer was in there.

Then Vic began to cry and run her fingers through her hair till she was a sight to behold; and there was her betrothed lover on the other side of the partition, waiting for her.

I shook her and gave her some of the peppermint essence we had brought with us, and that set her to laughing.

"The idea of *my* being married! So puffickly reedicklus! Look here, Van, will you marry him too? If you'll do it, I will!"

"Hush, Victoria Asbury! He'll hear you through that crack in the door. Brush your hair, and go in this minute."

"Say, will you marry him too? I'll never, no never, desert Mr. Micawber."

I could not help laughing to see the faces she made, though I was out of all patience with her.

"I will not go in," said she, "I will not." If you don't help me out of this scrape, Van, I'll never forgive you as long as I live."

"But Vic, dear, it is n't my affair."

"But Van, dear, what's mine is yours."

"Hush!" said I. "Is this any time to trifle?"

I stood and thought a minute, for somebody must think. I was ashamed and sorry to the depths of my soul, knowing now that Vic had truly made the great mistake of her life in promising to marry Mr. Ulmer. She had not meant to deceive him; but oh! how could she ever atone for the pain he was about to suffer?

"Vic dear, it is awful, but you will have to face it. Go right in, and have it over with."

"But I tell you I can't. You must go, Van."

"Go with me, then."

"Not for a thousand worlds!"

"Vic," said I, indignantly, "you haven't the courage to tell him you don't like him; but do you suppose it is any easier for me to do it than it is for you?"

"Oh, but I do like him, I'm very much in love with him," said she, laughing so loud that it seemed as if he could not help hearing her, though her head was in the pillow.

"Vic, can you be serious?"

"As if seriousness wasn't part of my nature! Ain't I crying?" sobbed she. "What more do you ask? I should think if you cared the least thing about

me, your own twin sister, you'd go and see Mr. Ulmer and talk to him."

"Talk? What shall I say?"

"Say just what you please, — anything in the world, — and I'll bear you out in it."

"Why, Victoria, you're enough to try the patience of a saint. Do you suppose I'll go without a message from you?"

"Well, then," said she, clenching her fist, "tell him it's like death to think of seeing him, and the very sound of his name has turned me sick all over. There, will that do?"

And the poor child threw herself into my arms, crying as I never saw her cry before, in a perfect agony of despair.

"O Van! I've been reckless and wicked, but I never saw into my own heart till this minute, — not way down into the bottom of it. I'm the greatest sinner that walks this earth"

"Darling, you did n't mean anything wrong."

"How do you know? Weren't you shocked at me yourself? What if I became engaged out of pique?"

"O Vic, you did n't do that!"

"I don't know. I'm not sure of anything, only that I hate the name of Ulmer, — hate it worse than Doggerty. But I'll marry him, Van, if you say so. I can stand it, I suppose."

I turned to the glass to arrange my hair.

"My love, my blessing, you are going in!" cried Vic.
"I knew you'd go."

"Yes," said I, pitying her to the ends of my fingers,
"I'll go."

"Well, don't be so slow, there's a good girl. Tell him I won't see him if he stays all night, and he need n't call again, for I shan't ever see him. But I'll marry him sometime, you know, if you think it's absolutely necessary, Van. I don't want to break my word. Only, Van, don't wait till 'after supper.' Do hurry!"

It was of no use dallying any longer, hoping for a reasonable message from Vic; so I kissed her and ran off, trembling in every limb, and feeling as if I would rather have faced a cannonade than Lucius Ulmer.

As I entered the sitting-room he rose with a pleasant smile of anticipation; but when he saw it was I instead of Vic, his look changed to one of surprise.

"Ah! how do you do, my dear Vandelia?" said he, coming towards me with outstretched hand and a good-manners smile. "I am very glad to see you looking so well, my fair sister; but where is — Victoria?"

Then came the tug of war. I must answer immediately; for a moment's pause and my presence of mind would be gone entirely.

"She is very nervous this evening, sir," said I, looking at the strip of carpet in the middle of the floor. "She begged me to make her excuses, for she did not feel able to see you."

"I am extremely sorry," replied Mr. Ulmer, regretfully; but there was not the least chagrin in his tone. "Nervous, did you say? She is probably fatigued."

"Perhaps so. We have just returned from a long walk; but I don't think it is that, sir. Vic is — well, you know Vic is rather apt to be nervous."

"You surprise me. I thought her health was perfect,

and I'm sure she has the finest spirits of any one I ever saw in my life."

I did not know what answer to make to that. "Yes, sir; her health is perfect." And then I surveyed the carpet again.

"Miss Vandelia," said Mr. Ulmer, twisting his mustache with his white hand, "I wish you would exercise your authority,—I know you have a good deal,—and absolutely forbid her taking such long walks. Probably she is not as strong as she seems, and you are the stronger of the two, though you look more delicate. Please remember the difference in your temperaments too. You are quiet and passive, while she abounds in gayety and nervous force, which sometimes carry her beyond bounds. Will you promise me, for my sake, if not for your sister's, that you will take more care of her health in future?"

This long speech had such an arrogant ring that it hardened my heart a little. I ventured to look up, but only saw the diamond on his little finger. I really had not quite the courage to meet his eye

"When I can assume the entire charge of the dear girl," said he, waving his right hand imperially, "I flatter myself I shall know exactly how to manage her. A person of her temperament needs to be studied, and I have often observed that the members of one's own family are the last to understand one's idiosyncrasies: did you ever think of it?"

"No, sir."

"But if you will consider the question you will see that I am right," pursued Mr. Ulmer, going off into a harangue upon metaphysics, which I did n't even try to

follow. But I was growing bolder every minute, and almost felt like smiling to think how differently the interview was turning out from what I had expected. Instead of my making a speech to a rejected lover, he was making a speech to me, not giving me a moment's chance to explain the matter.

From metaphysics he went back to an account of Mr. Peters's illness, which was happily over now, so that he had felt quite easy to leave the young man behind him at Paris, while he came hither to give Vic a pleasant surprise.

"After all," thought I, "perhaps it's just as well that I can't explain. I should only burn my own fingers. What good did Aunt Marian Hinsdale do by meddling with this affair in the first place? If she had let that slate alone, I don't believe Vic would ever have corresponded with Mr. Ulmer."

Then, as he began to draw on his gloves, I made a final resolve to let him go in peace; for how did I know but Vic was having a mere freak, and would feel differently before morning? It did not seem likely, but I concluded to "give him the benefit of the doubt," as the lawyers say.

"My love, if you please, to your sister," said Mr. Ulmer, with a smile and an elegant bow, "and tell her I will give myself the pleasure of renewing my call in the morning."

His love! With what assurance he spoke! It grated on my ears, for this was the first time I had seen him since the engagement. I had always thought he seemed pretty sure of Vic, as if he had only to speak and she was his; but of course he had never ventured to use the language of ownership before.

"Well," said Vic, when I returned to her, "how did he bear it?"

"I only told him you were nervous, Vic, but he bore that like a hero. I think by his appearance he can bear a great deal more, and you will have the whole night to make up a speech in, for he will be here again to-morrow."

"Oh dear! oh dear! I thought 't was all settled. I can't see him, I can't, and I shan't."

She held firmly to this mind; and when Mr. Ulmer called in the morning I was forced to give him another sight of my unwelcome face.

"What! Not recovered yet from her fatigue? I am afraid she is going to be ill," said Mr. Ulmer, anxiously; but still without the least suspicion that she was n't longing to see him,—not even when I'd taken pains to tell him she had been out early to market with me that morning. I thought this was remarkable in the young man.

"The truth is, Mr. Ulmer," said I, clutching the arm of my chair to brace myself, "the truth is, she is in a very singular state of mind. I can't quite explain it, and I don't know what you'll think of her; but—"

"Pray go on," said Mr. Ulmer, graciously. "I probably understand her peculiar temperament better than you do, and can make all allowances for her."

"Well, I really hope so, sir. I should be sorry to have you blame her, though she certainly is to blame; she knows it herself, and is perfectly wretched about it."

"Wretched about what?" inquired he, blandly.

"Why, because she fears she has mistaken her feelings towards you, sir," said I, quivering like a leaf.

"She thought she cared for you; but now she finds she does n't, or at any rate, sir, she thinks she does n't."

Mr. Ulmer made a quick exclamation, and rose from his chair.

"What do you mean?" said he, almost fiercely. "Will you have the goodness to look at me, Vandelia, and repeat that last sentence distinctly?"

His eyes were flashing; but I felt instinctively that his anger was directed towards me instead of Vic.

"She is afraid she has n't the right feeling towards you, sir," repeated I, as steadily as I could. "She didn't mean to deceive you,—really and truly she did n't; but I told her I was sure you would n't want matters to go any further if you only knew."

"*You* told her!" exclaimed Mr. Ulmer, picking up my words and throwing them back at me, as if they were the cause of the whole trouble. "*You* told her? And pray, may I ask, Miss Vandelia, how long it has been since you were chosen umpire between us?"

There! that was all the thanks I got for meddling.

"Sir, I am not an umpire, I'm only Vic's messenger. I have never had anything to do with this affair from first to last. She did n't ask my advice when she engaged herself, nor mother's, nor Helen's. She had her own way then, and she has it now. I tried to make her come in and talk with you herself, but she would n't; she sent me. And having done the errand as well as I can, sir, I will now bid you good-morning."

With that I began to move backward towards the door; but Mr. Ulmer advanced very politely, and extended his hand. All traces of ill-humor were gone from his face, and he looked—I hardly know what

adjectives to use; but perhaps indulgent and condescending will do as well as any.

"A thousand pardons, sister Vandelia. I spoke hastily; but you must know your message was rather startling, and I was not exactly prepared for it."

"You are very excusable, sir."

"But upon reflection I can see just how this caprice of your sister's must have originated; and upon my word it does not occasion me the slightest uneasiness."

I should think not, surely. He was quite comfortable in his mind, to all appearances, twirling his mustache as he talked.

"Victoria Asbury is a very sensitive girl, and I regret that I have offended her; but I can easily explain everything to her satisfaction."

"I assure you, sir, she is not offended."

"'Sir!' Call me brother," said the irrepressible young man with a smile. "You think she is not offended, but you will probably acknowledge that I am more likely to understand the matter than you are. At any rate, you cannot wonder I insist upon seeing her."

Here he drew out a pencil, tore a leaf from a notebook, and scribbled a few lines to Vic, which he gave me with a confident air, as if they possessed magic power to heal all wounds.

I said no more, I had already said too much; all I could do was to carry the note to Vic, for her to rave over and tear into inch-pieces.

"He says I'm grieved because he has n't written me as often as usual lately. I'm sure I never knew but he had. He thinks he ought n't to have come to Heidel-

berg without letting me know; I could n't bear the surprise. Does he take me for a perfect idiot?"

"Oh, no; he only thinks you're as much in love as he is, Vic."

"Well, and he says he must and will see me. Van, it's like being subpoenaed to a court of justice. I won't see you, Mr. Ubiquitous, so there!"

"Then you'll have to write him," said I, putting my foot down, "write him and mail your own letter; for I shall lose all my self-respect if I play go-between any longer."

"Write him? Yes, I'll write him and tell him to thank his stars he has escaped marrying a horrible reprobate."

But she ended with a sob.

"O Van, Van!" said she, "I do suppose Mr. Ulmer will take this to heart. I had no business to let him get to loving me. I ought to be drawn and quartered."

It was a very humble letter that she wrote, full of penitence for her mistake, but without a word that could afford one ray of hope.

I was obliged to give it to Mr. Ulmer after all, at his next visit, for we did not know where he boarded; but I gave it through the crack of the sitting-room door, and ran away immediately, leaving him to read and ponder at his leisure.

CHAPTER XXV.

VIC'S STORY.

DELICATE ATTENTIONS.

“ Sweet heaven, I do love a maiden,
Radiant, fair, and beauty laden.”

THE first of September Morris and Helen came back from Switzerland to go with us to Paris.

“ Why, Vic, how’s this? You’re looking thin,” was Helen’s greeting. “ What’s the matter, dear?”

“ German verbs,” said I, promptly ; and Van told the rest. I had made her promise beforehand to say as little as possible about the Ulmer hysterics.

But oh, I was so ashamed of myself at best ! I felt so small and despicable ! I wanted to slink away into a corner out of sight, only Helen held me. Of course my fickleness troubled her, and yet I fancy on the whole she was relieved to find the engagement broken, — or dissolved ; I doubt if it had been firm enough to be broken. I don’t think she or mother had ever approved of my accepting Mr. Ulmer. For that matter, I’m not sure I had ever approved of it myself, except as a means of declaring my independence of Van.

Well, I had declared it to my own dissatisfaction. I didn’t in general consider myself so very much of a sinner ; but now you might have called me all the hard

names in the dictionary, and I should have believed you. That last week at Heidelberg I cried half the time. Van was a lady, she did all she could to comfort me ; but one day, when I received a beautiful note from Mr Theobold, saying they were to be detained in Stuttgart, and he very much feared would not return to Heidelberg in season to see us again, Van unwittingly lodged this arrow in my soul :—

“ Well, Vic, after all, if it had to be one of the two, I’m glad it was Mr. Ulmer you trifled with instead of Mr. Theobold ; for Mr. Ulmer is n’t sensitive, and I guess he’ll get over it, but I’m afraid it would have almost killed Mr. Theobold ”

When she said that on purpose to comfort me, how could I tell her about that little scene in the tower? I could n’t. Besides, it might not have meant so much as I thought ; and certainly Mr. Theobold’s note was anything but a love-letter. I had enough to trouble me without worrying about him.

We left Heidelberg suddenly at last, for Morris and Helen had come unexpectedly.

We did hate to abandon our cosey housekeeping, especially Van, for she had looked upon it as a foreshadowing of the home we would have together for good, one of these days, when my love-affairs were over, and we were settled down as old maids.

We almost cried at parting with our copper teakettle, so the tears came freely when we parted with Fräulein Zipp. I can see the comfortable body this minute, as I saw her then, standing upon the doorstep, dressed in gray, with lavish streamers of scarlet. As we walked down the mountain we turned our heads,

and she was standing there still, looking in the distance like a substantial stone pillar flaming with woodbine.

Well, we went back to Madame Rey's, and she kissed us on both cheeks twice over, calling us her "*petites anges Anglaises*." Helen and Morris went on to Rome, and we settled into our old ways, only that I wrote no letters to Mr. Ulmer now. We locked up our German books, and tried to think in French; and every Thursday afternoon and oftener we took our holiday at the Du Souchets' as before.

Clum called at once, and seemed delighted to have us "home again." I had forgotten how handsome the youth was,—really handsomer than necessary for a man.

Dr. Zelig was driven with practice as usual, and we saw but little of him till our first evening at his house. He slouched in just before tea, when we were all gathered in the parlor; and after shaking hands with us, threw himself on the sofa beside me.

"Glad to see you again, Victoria. How is it? Has it been well with you this summer?"

"It? What, sir?"

"Well, life, for instance. Have you and your sister been happy in Heidelberg?"

"Yes, sir, thank you, as happy as the German language will permit."

"I think you speak the truth, so far as Evangeline is concerned," said Dr. Zelig, coolly, glancing at her across the room. "She looks as serene as an English violet."

"And how do I look? As warlike as a Canada thistle, I suppose."

Dr. Zelig laughed. "I've told you before, Victoria, I'm not in the least afraid of your temper?"

"Oh well, but you insinuated that I didn't seem peaceful."

He leaned back upon the sofa, and looked at me critically.

"Well, you don't, Victoria, it's a fact," said he, with an emphatic nod. "There's a hitch in your physical or mental machinery: which is it?"

"Or possibly the hitch is in my hair, Doctor. I'm trying a new 'do' on it."

"Ah! if it's there I won't try to prescribe," said he, laughing again in an unbelieving way.

I could n't help thinking that, though he suspected nothing of the trouble on my mind, he was the only one of my friends who could really have sympathized with me. He knew to his cost what a horrid thing it is to make and break a foolish engagement.

"I'll go and protect Evangeline," said he, "for here comes Uncle Pauli."

The poor old body was walking in with the most extraordinary gait, as if he were jerked along on wires. He had dropped a stitch in his back, he said; I never thought he was well-knit. Aunt Filura bustled around, elbows out and cap-strings flying, to wheel his chair away from draughts, and that took him over to my corner to deluge me with his woes. He deigned to talk to me now, for he had forgotten his fears respecting Lucius and myself. It seemed a pity to dispute him when he called himself "a cumberer of the ground" and other pet names, but I had to do it to be polite.

"No, no, I'm good for nothing, Victory," said he,

with a sly glance at Miss Wix. "A man of my years without a partner is a poor tool. I met with a great loss when my wife died; you're knowing to that, Filury?"

Aunt Filura bobbed her head sympathetically, — all she could do just then, for she was binding off a stocking, and had two needles in her mouth.

"Yes," pursued he in an obituary tone, "she was a real helpmeet, pious, industrious, and saving, — a notch above the common run. Still, I missed it in not taking another companion. A man has no business to worry through his last days alone, when there are so many women unprovided for; it's clear selfishness."

I glanced at Aunt Filura. She was rocking placidly to and fro, slipping loop over loop, and looking as unconcerned as a listening moon. I suppose it did n't once occur to her that Mr. Dougherty's remarks were pointed towards herself.

"Yes, I missed it," repeated Uncle Paoli, laying his hand on my cheek, and giving me a scrawny caress. "Yes, yes, depend upon it, child, folks are better off married. We were never made to live single. Beg your pardon, Filury, maybe you ain't of my mind?"

"O yes, Mr. Doggerty," said she, transferring the needles to the crown of her cap, and speaking up as unembarrassed as if they were discussing Foreign Missions. "The Lord ordained that people should marry, and it's reasonable to believe they are blessed in carrying out his designs."

"No doubt on't," assented Uncle Paoli, looking so flattered that I could n't stand it another minute, and remarked that I'd observed married people who seemed the reverse of beatified.



**"THERE, YOU SEE TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE."
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"Well, maybe they'd got missmated," said Aunt Filura, rolling the finished stockings together, with a reflective smile. "When couples go straight against the Lord's manifest leadings, and pair off contrary to it, how can they expect a blessing?"

"But how are they to know whom the Lord designs them to marry?" said I, half laughing, half earnest. "How's anybody to know? 'T would be a great relief to me to find out."

I looked up, and there stood Clum behind Aunt Filura's chair, eyeing me inquisitively. I felt myself blushing like a field of red clover. I could n't help it. It was one thing to discuss matrimony with such serious old parties as Miss Wix and Mr. Daugherty, and quite another to discuss it before Clum.

"When you're doubtful about the Lord's purposes, Victoria, I should say it was safest to wait for a leading," said Aunt Filura cheerfully, going to put away her work. I wondered if she had been waiting all these years for a leading? I did n't know about its being safe to wait. Neither did Uncle Paoli, to judge by his next remark.

"I've no worse wish for you, Victory," said he, patting my head without the least mercy for crimps, "than to see you pick up a good steady partner."

As though husbands were scattered round the country like ripe chestnuts, and girls were to gather them! It was good of Clum to walk off just then.

Presently Aunt Filura came back with a skein of yarn to wind. Uncle Paoli squared his elbows immediately.

"Here, Filura, shan't I hold that for you?"

It made quite a picture, — benignant Aunt Filura, her cap a trifle askew and shining with a halo of knitting-needles, bending forward to slip the skein over Uncle Paoli's stiff old wrists, while he looked on, evidently delighted at being thus caught in her toils. She had to put on her glasses to hunt for the beginning of the yarn, and after all he found it first; his eyes were much sharper than his ears.

"There, you see two heads are better 'n one, Filura," said he triumphantly, as between them they fished out the missing end. "I always told you so, and it seems from what you said just now that you agree with me."

I moved away to the window, but his voice followed me like the vibrations of a cracked drum.

"You won't mind my saying it, Filury, — we're old friends, you know, rocked in the same cradle, — you won't mind my saying it, but it always appeared kind o' singular that you never married; and I've wondered whether or no you had n't somehow got sot agin matrimony."

Aunt Filura was winding her ball in a quick, jerky way that shook her all over. She looked up at Mr. Daugherty in mild surprise, but had no answer ready.

"What?" asked he, with his right hand to his ear, yarn and all. That twitched the ball from Miss Wix's grasp, and they both stooped for it, Uncle Paoli dropping another stitch, and coming near being picked up on Aunt Filura's bristling needles.

"I did n't say anything," said she, sitting down again.

"Oh!" said Uncle Paoli, rising from all-fours with a look of chagrin. Then there fell a pause.

"Of course I should n't have spoken so, Filury, if I had n't known you'd had good chances," he began again presently, reeling off three threads of yarn at once. "I see I've hurt your feelings though, and —"

Here the supper-bell rang, and everybody rose. But I seemed destined to play eavesdropper to my venerable uncle and aunt, for I did it again next Thursday when we all took a trip down the Seine to Sèvres, where they make the famous porcelain.

I fancy Aunt Filura had at length become conscious of "Mr. Doggerty's" intentions, for she avoided him all the afternoon. As often as his forlorn highness approached her, she rushed off on some absurd errand, leaving him to make believe he was n't looking for her at all, but had come to speak to somebody else. They nearly convulsed us at the china manufactory by their game of hide and seek. If Aunt Filura donned her spectacles to examine a delicate piece of china, out came Uncle Paoli's; but while they were in the very act of striding his nose, presto! Aunt Filura would vanish, to reappear in the remotest corner of the building.

In spite of his best-laid schemes there was no opportunity for a *tête à tête* till after we had returned to the boat. I had no idea of interfering in Uncle Paoli's behalf, but I did so by turning my ankle in running down the steps. It pained me so I could n't bear to have anybody speak to me; and after stowing me away in a corner of the lower deck, with my feet on an improvised cricket, Van and the others went to the upper one; all but Aunt Filura, who sat within call in case I should want anything.

"Don't you trouble, Victoria," said she, drawing out her handkerchief, "I'd sooner stay than not, for it's warmer down here, and I've got some cold; my head feels hollow."

It certainly sounded hollow. To hear Aunt Filura blow her nasal organ you felt that it was an organ indeed. Uncle Paoli couldn't have thought she was signalling him, though, that he should have come stumping down the stairs at that minute. He edged through the crowd, and took a seat beside her, with his back to me. I don't believe he knew I was there.

Her countenance suddenly fell, furnishing him with a text.

"You seem low in your mind, Filury. I was thinking you were n't pestered with the blues as I be."

As if he were not the blues personified, and "pestering" her with all his might!

"No, Mr. Doggerty, I don't suppose I am. I'm cheerful naturally, and then I've always had my health."

"You're favored there. Still, health is n't everything, if you have n't the wherewithal to live easy," insinuated the crafty old swain, resting his chin on his walking-stick. "I take it you'd enjoy yourself better, Filury, if you was to have a snug little property to look forward to in your old age."

"I don't borrow trouble," said Aunt Filura, hurriedly; "I'm in the Lord's hands. He has provided for me so far, and I'm willing to trust him"

Uncle Paoli jerked his cane up and down impatiently, as if it had been a churn-dash, and the butter would n't come. Evidently he found Miss Wix's piety distasteful just then.

"No doubt, no doubt!" said he, after a pause. "But it's hard for a woman to rub along alone, without a companion. Don't you think, now, Filury, you'd be happier with somebody to lean on?"

The idea of strong, self-reliant Aunt Filura leaning on poor, shaky Uncle Paoli! You might as well speak of a flag-staff leaning on a flag.

"No, Mr. Doggerty, I don't," said she, agitated but honest. "I'm contented as I am. I'm too old to change my situation."

"What say?"

"I'm too *old* to *change* my *situation*," repeated Aunt Filura, in an elevated key which attracted the attention of everybody within a radius of ten feet. I only hoped they did n't understand English.

"Pooh! pooh!" returned Uncle Paoli, patronizingly. "Your age is no objection to me; you have your faculties complete. Here you are alone in the world, and so'm I, and I've got means enough to carry us both through handsomely, and what's to hinder —"

"No, no, Mr. Doggerty!" interrupted Aunt Filura, with unusual warmth. "I'm thankful I ain't married, and what's more, I'm thankful I don't want to be!"

"Well, of all things now!" said Uncle Paoli, quite taken aback. "That don't agree with what you said the other day about folks being better off married."

"I was talking about young folks, Mr. Doggerty."

"You was, hey? Well, I was n't, and I ain't now," said Uncle Paoli, spitefully. "You are getting pretty well along, Filury, pretty well along. It makes me feel ugly to see a woman of your age stand in her own light so!"

With that he stalked off as erect as his rheumatism would permit, ready to shake somebody. It was a great relief to me to be able to laugh. "O Aunt Filura, Aunt Filura!" said I, "what have you done?"

She was the picture of distress, and her dress seemed to be in a sort of delirium. Her collar had pranced round under her ear and her bonnet was very far gone indeed; I had to pry it up from the back of her neck.

"I'm dreadful sorry I could n't have stopped it before it got to such a pass," exclaimed she, referring to Uncle Paoli's offer, of course. "But Victoria, I can't feel it my duty to marry that man, to take care of him. He's rich, and able to hire a nurse."

It was the sharpest remark I ever heard from Aunt Filura; but she could not imagine what I was laughing at.

"A man is no gentleman that'll put a question in that way, as if he was conferring an obligation upon a woman!" continued she, excitedly. "Did he suppose I'd marry him or any other man for the sake of being provided for? But then I do pity Mr. Doggerty. He don't seem to take any comfort; and he never did when his wife was alive either. I think he's full as happy now as ever he was."

CHAPTER XXVI.

VAN'S STORY.

IN THE CABINET.

"NOW, Van," said Vic one night in October, as she was ransacking the drawer for her sleeping-gloves, "it does seem as if we're beginning to glide along quietly. I've survived Ulmerism, and in future I'm going to leave love-affairs to Uncle Paoli. I'm tired of foolishness, and want to study."

"So do I, Vic. I'll stop flirting if you will."

"None of your sarcasm, now," said she, thrusting her forefinger into the thumb of a glove and shaking it at me. "Have n't I been as discreet as a duenna ever since we left Heidleberg? Say, Miss Prig?"

"Never saw a duenna; but I'm sure you've behaved beautifully."

"I'm sure I want to. As Mr. Liscom used to say at prayer-meeting, 'I'm a-strivin' to walk in the path of dooty' But I'm spiritually tender-footed, Van, that's the matter with me."

"Dr. Zelie said yesterday he thought you'd grown very womanly lately, Vic."

"Did he? Well, so has he. He used to be horridly masculine; grumpy, you know. If we've both im-

proved, why, it stands to reason it's because we're both disengaged. Moral: Shun an engagement, my infant."

"I can do it without trying," said I.

"I wonder how Dr. Zelig feels since he's shaken off *Félicité*?" mused Vic, anointing her lips with glycerine. "I guess I know he has a sore place in his chest, as if he'd torn off a blister. I tell you I'd be glad to console with him if he was easy to talk with, like Clum."

"He is sometimes."

"Sometimes, yes; but for all times give me his boy. Clum is *simpatico* to me. Excuse my speaking Italian, you know how hard it is to remember one's English."

"Yes, and you are *simpatico* to him."

"To be sure; just as I am to Aunt Filura. You know what I mean; there's a perfect understanding between us. Clum sees that my mind is on my studies, Van, where it ought to be."

"And where is his, — on cross-bones?"

"Of course. And really he does n't admire me half as much as you imagine. I should feel flattered if I thought he ever said such things about me as he says about you."

"Why, Vic, what do you mean?"

"Oh, he raves about you to me at a great rate, — so unselfish, so persevering, so common-sensible, and dear me! I don't know what all. Next time I'm going to take notes and report word for word"

With that Vic blew out the candle, and I had to get into bed in the dark. The conversation made but little impression upon me at the time, and I should scarcely have thought of it again if it had not been for what

followed soon after. I liked Clum, and he was very polite to me as well as to Vic. I found his attentions very agreeable, but had no more idea of appropriating them to myself than the rays of the sun.

The next day was Thursday, and in the afternoon he and his uncle were going with us to Hotel de Cluny. Dr. Zelie was so busy that Clum had to tease him a long while before he would consent to fritter away so much time, and I was afraid it would rain after all, and prevent our going; it had rained all through the autumn thus far. But this especial Thursday dawned almost clear, and though clouds began to gather before noon, we pretended not to see them, and started off in fine spirits, "quite unbeknown" to Uncle Paoli. We had seen very little of him for the past month, since his unfortunate affair with Aunt Filura. Hotel de Cluny was new to me, and I was anticipating a very good time, but had n't the remotest idea of an adventure; there was nothing in the atmosphere that promised it.

We just jogged along through the rooms till dusk began to fall, looking at the curiosities and laughing at Vic's questions. She stole a rag from the bed-quilt of Francis I, and Clum said was liable to be severely fined; but she did n't seem alarmed. We came to some magnificent old chariots, which were so enormously heavy that it seemed as if they must have been drawn by mastodons or elephants instead of horses. In every room there were large chimney-pieces, very deep and high; and Dr. Zelie walked into one of them, saying, "Come, Evangeline, let me measure you by these andirons; I'll warrant they will reach to your shoulders."

It was as if he had vanished in a cave, for it had grown so dark in the room that but for his white linen he was almost invisible.

But before I could answer him Clum came along, and led me into one of the cabinets. It was of ebony, carved from top to bottom with a sort of fine lace-work. I looked here and there at the odd compartments, and was thinking what fine chances there were for secret drawers, when Clum suddenly exclaimed in an agitated voice, just above a whisper, "It's of no use! I can never catch you alone for a single moment. Listen to me, oh, listen!"

I was astonished enough to be very anxious to listen; but he only cleared his throat, and paced the cabinet rapidly. I waited quite still, for this sudden change in his manner was perfectly unaccountable. At last he came nearer to me, and stopped.

"Don't run away, dear. Do listen! You are young, very young; so am I; and I suppose I'm inconsiderate, yes, I know I'm inconsiderate; but you must have seen my feelings towards you."

No, I had n't. What feelings? thought I.

"How can a man help such a thing? I tell you it's fate!"

Here he brought his heels down hard, but without interrupting the rapid flow of his words.

"It is something that must be said. I can't keep it to myself any longer. Sometimes it has almost seemed as if you returned my feelings; and then again I knew well enough you did n't and could n't, and it was n't of the least use to speak. That's just the way I feel this minute, — ready to die of despair; but I'm bound I'll

tell you I love you, whether you scorn it or not. Nobody else ever loved you as I do; and it began the first moment we met on board the Prussian. My heart went right out to you, and I could n't reason it back again. I tell you there's no such thing as reason where your feelings are concerned."

While he talked he scarcely looked at me, but straight overhead, as if I were hovering above him in the spirit.

"Speak quick," added he, moving away from me suddenly, "speak quick! I can bear it."

If I had been flayed alive, I could n't have spoken just then. I had heard that girls generally have a premonition when men are about to say things like this, but I was entirely unprepared for such a declaration from Clum.

"Oh, yes, laughing at me!" said he, pacing the floor again in high excitement. "I was dead sure you did n't care for me; but do for mercy's sake speak! It is n't fair to treat a fellow in this way."

I went up to him, and held out my hand. "Do forgive me, Clum, but I never was so astonished in my life, and that was why I could n't say anything. How could you think I was laughing at you? But hark! here they come."

He sprang away from me as the sound of voices reached us. Vic and Dr. Zelig were disputing about something, — I forget what; but as they came into the cabinet Vic called out, "Clum, Van, where are you hiding? Don't you see it's going to rain?"

Clum made no reply, but seemed to be very busy opening little doors and slides in the cabinet. I knew the boy did not know what he was about; but as Vic

rattled on and nobody minded him, he gradually recovered his composure.

"It is high time we were going," said Dr. Zelig, offering his arm to me, and leaving Clum to walk with Vic. I was thankful it happened so, for I did n't want to be near Clum again till I had had time to think a little. Good, handsome, true-hearted fellow! I had just had my first glimpse into his deeper nature, which he kept so carefully covered up in layers of fun and make-believe. What he had said to me had touched me strangely, and left me as silent as himself.

"Evangeline, you ought to have told us how tired you were, and we would have come away sooner," said Dr. Zelig, who must have felt me trembling on his arm; but his eyes shot very keen glances towards me in the dusk. Perhaps he suspected something more than fatigue.

The uppermost thought in my mind was Clum. Why had n't I answered him at once? But I was always just so slow to comprehend, and slow to speak. Now he would have to repeat that scene, and it would be so painful unless, — well, unless I was mistaken in myself. It wins upon anybody so much to be loved that maybe I should care for Clum one of these days as he cared for me, — as he had cared for so long. How did I know but I should? Ah! I can't tell how I knew; but I knew.

When we reached the Du Souchets' it was beginning to rain.

"Supper has been waiting a whole hour," cried Etienne.

Clum scarcely smiled during the meal, and I saw his uncle watching him.

"Why, Clum, what's the matter?" said Vic. "You eye your toast as sorrowfully as if it were the remains of your last friend"

"There's something I forgot to attend to," replied Clum. "Got to go right away after supper; hope to be excused."

And the moment we rose from table he slipped off. I sat all the evening dreading the walk to Madame Rey's, for I thought Clum would be back to go with us, and Vic would rally him again on his low spirits; but he did not come, and Dr. Zelig took his place. It was the first time Clum had failed us, and Vic thought it "extraor-dinary."

As soon as we were in our own chamber I said, "I think I can explain it." And then I repeated the strange talk in the cabinet.

Vic stared at me amazed.

"Yes, dear, it does seem incredible. I never was so surprised in my life, and that was what I told Clum."

Still she did not speak, but turned away, and began to take down her back hair.

"Is n't it queer that I never had the faintest suspicion of his feelings, Vic?"

"H'm!"

"Why was I so in the dark?"

"Can't say."

"But did *you* ever suppose he cared for me?"

"No."

"You spoke of his praising me to you; but I did n't think anything of that."

Blank silence.

"Vic, what makes you act so?"

"Tired and sleepy."

"But tell me what you think of all this."

"Extraor-dinary."

"Are n't you sorry for Clum?"

"Why?"

"Because he has made such a mistake."

"Don't see his mistake."

"Why, Vic, don't you know I could n't possibly love him?"

"No, I don't."

"O Vic! when you won't see a thing you won't; but Clum and I were n't made for each other, and I'll have to tell him so."

"Better undress before the candle burns out," was the dry reply.

"O Vic! I thought you'd have a little sympathy."

"For Clum? Pooh! 'the moon-struck elf.'"

"Well, for me then. I do feel dreadfully."

"You'll get over it," said Vic. "It's only a question of time between you and Clum."

"Do you mean that I shall change my mind?"

"No; when you once make it up."

"But, Vic—"

"Further saith not," said she, settling her head into the pillow. And that ended the one-sided talk.

Before I went to sleep I decided to write a three-cornered note to Clum and slip it into his hand, French-fashion, next time we met. I did n't know exactly how to word it, and thought I'd consult Vic in the morning; but she woke up so fractious that I did n't dare. Everything went wrong with her, and I could n't imagine what was the matter.

Just as we were going down to lunch, a card was brought up from Dr. Zelig.

"What suppose he wants?" said I.

"Go and see," said Vic.

"But you'll go too?"

"No, I'm hungry. One at a time is enough."

I did not stop to argue the point, but went into the salon alone. Dr. Zelig came towards me with his hat in his hand.

"Can you tell me anything about my boy?"

"What boy?"

His eyes were so earnest, so searching, that I was a little bewildered for a moment. How much did he know? What did he expect me to say?

"Has he been here this morning, Vandelia?"

"Been here? Oh, no. He never comes in the morning. What made you think he had been here?"

"Nothing; but he has gone away," replied Dr. Zelig, with an odd smile: "do you know where?"

"Gone away!"

"Yes, last night about midnight I saw an apparition at my bedside, 'all saddled, all booted, all fit for a fight.' 'I'm off,' said the spectre; and before I could ask a single question he disappeared; it was raining hard too."

"Why, Dr. Zelig, what does it mean?"

"That's just what we all want to find out," he replied, his eyes still reading my face. "Did you hear him say anything yesterday about an excursion with some of his friends?"

"No."

"Or about any sort of project?"

"No."

"I recollect you were closeted with him in one of those cabinets, and it occurred to me that he might have been talking to you of his plans."

"Oh, no, indeed, not a word," said I, trying so hard to look unconscious that my face turned crimson.

"Did he seem to be in an uncomfortable state of mind?" asked the doctor, after a pause. "I don't wish to ask any impertinent questions, Evangeline; I merely want to know if there was anything in his manner that would warrant you in supposing he might do something rather desperate."

"Oh dear! I don't know. He did n't seem like himself," said I, frightened, as I remembered his strange manner.

"He was overwrought, and talked differently from usual: is that what you mean?"

"Yes, sir, he certainly did. But then I never thought, — I never supposed —"

"There, that will do," said the doctor abruptly, but giving my hand a kind pressure as he turned to go. "I won't make you say another word. But don't take it to heart, Evangeline; it's only a fit of pique, and the boy will get over it and come back thoroughly ashamed of himself. Don't worry. 'T will be all right in a day or two."

CHAPTER XXVII.

VIC'S STORY.

SEIZING THE REINS.

"Have I lover who is noble and free?
I would he were nobler than to love me."

— *Emerson.*

ALL the next day Van went about as quietly as ever, but with her eyes shining like the Gemini, by which I knew she was considerably stirred up. She kept dragging Clum into the conversation, and I kept waving him off. I did n't want to talk about him.

"I cannot understand it, Vic," said she that evening, laying down her pen in the middle of her French exercise, "I cannot. Why did n't Clum give me some hint of this before?"

"Must be a first time, I suppose."

"But, Vic, it was so abrupt. And then his not coming home with us! Don't you think that was very odd? And then to run off!"

"Love's vagaries. You've read of 'em."

"Hush, Vic; do be sensible."

But here came a knock at the door, and a letter for Van. It was in Clum's handwriting. I recognized it at once, and skipped to the window to view the new moon over my left shoulder. The idea of Van's having a

correspondence I had n't a right to read! She had never had a love-letter in all her life till now. Who'd have thought the first one would have been from Clum?

"Vic Asbury, do come here!" she cried, the next minute. "You never heard of anything so comical in your life. Read this."

I leaned over her chair, and we ran through the curious document together. I insert it here *verbatim et blot-atim*: —

FONTAINEBLEAU, Oct. 10.

Dear Van, — I could shoot myself for a blind idiot! Of all the blundering fellows that walk God's earth I am chief! What could you have thought of me last evening? And what will you think of me now, when I tell you that I mistook you for Vic? It is too absurd for belief, but I did, and this confession is the only apology I can make for my crazy doings at the Hotel de Cluny. It was growing very dark, and you know how near-sighted I am. Besides, you and Vic must have changed places, for I'm sure I heard you and Uncle Zeke talking together by the chimney-piece a minute before. As you stood there in the door I never doubted you were Vic, and drew you into the dim old cabinet. I suppose I hardly looked at you, I was in such a whirl of embarrassment. If you had spoken I must have recognized your voice; but if you recollect, you never said a word. Perhaps you were too astounded. Did you think I'd lost my wits? For heaven's sake, forget it! I meant it all for Vic.

When you did speak I knew my blunder, and it seemed to me I could never face you again. I rushed away from Paris by the night-train, half-frantic.

Don't laugh at me, Van, more than you can't help, will you? And don't let Vic. I wonder how she looked last night when you told her of my rash proposal. I suppose you tell each other everything. She must have thought it very strange, when she knows well enough I've never had eyes for any girl but her, — nor eyes for her either, you might say; but you're

too kind-hearted to make fun of me when I'm down. I've decided to go back to Paris to-morrow, and brave it out.

And now, Van, do forgive my sublime stupidity if you can, — I can't, — and forget what an insufferable donkey I am, — fit only to eat grass like Nebuchadnezzar. If you will, I'll thank you on my knees.

Yours humbly,

COLUMBUS DU SOUCHET.

P. S. I have bought a pair of spectacles.

"Well, that explains it," said Van, looking immensely relieved.

But the comicality of the thing nearly upset me, and I laughed till the English lord's daughter pounded on the wall, threatening to come in and see what was the matter. "So lucky you did n't accept him, Van! Honestly, do you suppose you ever could have done it? "

"Oh, you can talk about it now, can you, Vic?" said she, with a quiet twinkle in her eye. "Well, I can't say what I might have done; but since he has sent a written protest, I should certainly feel a delicacy about accepting him now. Should rather *you* would, as it's all in the family."

"Oh, don't talk of engagements for me, Van; another one would be the death of me. I want a little peace."

"So do I," laughed Van, taking up her exercises again. "I hope I shan't have any more *vicarious* offers."

Monday Clum called. I tried to make Van go down with me, but she would n't. "I should be a simpleton," said she, "when he has seen me one time too many already. Besides, he inquired for only you."

He had come to ask me to ride ; so I ran back next minute for my hat and gloves.

"I should n't think you'd go," said prudent Van, "though I don't know. Maybe he'd better have a chance to speak, and be done with it."

"Never a chance will he get, mademoiselle. Now you'll see."

"But, Vic, if he's set his heart on it?"

"Well, he need n't," said, I dashing off. "I'll lead him through a wilderness of doubts and fears ; I'll teach him not to set his heart on things below."

"Vic," said Van, calling me back and fixing her eyes on me steadfastly, "didn't you promise to give up flirting? Haven't you suffered enough and caused others to suffer enough? and is it worth while?"

"Van," said I, "really and truly flirting is the very thing I mean to steer clear of henceforth and forever. Clum is too good to be trifled with, and you must n't think I'd do it, after the bitter lesson I've had."

I spoke my real feelings, and Van was satisfied.

I saw some of the little French girls peeping slyly from the windows as we drove away, and knew they were envying me with all their might,—though I certainly was a candidate for pity. It was sweet in Clum to care for me, but I was in a tremor lest he should say something about it. That would destroy the charm of our free-and-easy friendship, for I could n't be smothered in another engagement, and yet I could n't bear to give Clum up entirely. Why could n't we just go on in the nice old way?

I was resolved to hear nothing of the absurd interview with Van in the dark cabinet, and as often as

Clum led round to it I began to chatter animatedly about something else. Finally, topics ran low, and I got reduced to Mr. Daugherty.

"Have you seen Uncle Paoli since Thursday?"

Clum threw back his head laughing.

"Yes, met him on the street this morning, looking glum as a hatchet. His lack of resignation distresses Aunt Filly. Who knows but she'll marry him yet to save his feelings?"

"Why, Clum Du Souchet, your Aunt Filura is a sensible woman."

"Respectfully submitted."

"And Uncle Paoli is — well, he speaks for himself."

"Plaintively. Yes. If he ever prevails with her, it'll be through her infinite compassion. You can't tell how far that may take her."

"Don't let it take her to Uncle Paoli, Clum, for pity's sake. I'll drag her back by her cap-strings. Besides, women don't marry for compassion."

"Don't they? You speak like a veteran, Vic. What *do* they marry for?"

"Discipline, I suppose. Look, Clum, there's where the sublime and ridiculous meet."

We were riding through the Place de la Concorde, and right against the foot of the Egyptian Obelisk leaned a tipsy organ-grinder executing "The Last Rose of Summer."

"What say to that music, Clum? Rather cranky, isn't it? Wonder if the man realizes he's on revolutionary ground, frowned on by the statues of eight cities of France?"

Clum didn't answer. He was looking sharply at

the horse's head, as if it were a guide-board to be consulted. "I'm thinking, Vic," said he, presently, with a ghostly kind of a laugh, "I'm thinking of what you said about marrying for a discipline. If you really needed it, I'm afraid you could n't do any better than to —"

Here he broke short off to whip the horse, which started at such a pace that for the next half mile Clum had to give his whole attention to calming him down.

"Seriously, Vic," said he, as we had left the city behind us, and were jogging quietly over a country road, bordered with plane trees, "seriously now, would you be willing,—that is, would you risk—say, honor bright, Vic, do you think I'd be an awful discipline to the girl I married?"

It was n't so much what he said as what he made such a piece of work not saying, that set my heart fluttering like a leaf in a gale.

"To be sure, Clum," retorted I, briskly, "you'd be a discipline; a feeble one though, compared with Uncle Paoli." And back I flew to him and Aunt Filura.

But I could n't talk forever; I had to stop to breathe, and Clum took advantage of that physiological necessity.

"Look here, Vic," said he, hurriedly, scowling at the whip, "of course Van has told you the whole blundering —"

I snatched the reins right out of his hands, thinking of nothing but preventing his saying another word.

"Let me drive, Clum, please! Oh, yes, and I want the whip. There, is n't this gay? 'Do we go on? We do go on. Go we on so?' Hope you have n't forgotten your primer, Clum."

"You see, Vic, I thought it was you all the time till—"

"See, Clum, who says I can't drive? Get up, pony! What *is* that in French? Never mind, though, he understands I want him to go."

"But, Vic, I—"

"No, no, Clum! don't take the reins, I can hold him. There, I call this exciting!"

I had put the horse on his mettle, and we were tearing along pell-mell, shaken about in the roomy carriage like dice in a box. I never thought of fear. I did n't mean to be rash or reckless, I only wanted to hinder Clum from continuing that subject; and I did it. He had enough to do to keep his hat on, without talking sentiment. Besides, as I look back upon it, I think he was positively frightened for our lives, and at his wits' ends to know what to do with me.

He reached for the reins again, but I shook off his hand gayly.

"Let me have them a minute longer, Clum, just a minute! I'm crazy to ride fast! Is n't this poetry of motion now?"

"Too heroic for the age, Vic. Can't you see the horse is getting unmanageable? Look out for that *fiacre*, Victoria. Quick! Quick! Give me—"

There was a sudden crash, an interlocking of wheels, and the next thing I knew I was a tumbled heap by the road-side, with a strange gentleman leaning over me and asking me in French if I were hurt. I struggled to my feet, and looked around in a stupefied way for Clum. I wish I might forget the picture I saw there, but to my dying day I know I never shall. At my side was the

stranger's horse hitched to a tree, and still attached to the fiacre. Beyond him, some rods up the street, lay our carriage, overturned, and near it, in the middle of the dusty road, lay Clum, quite still, while another gentleman knelt beside him, feeling of an ugly gash in his temple.

My heart turned over. I prayed to die, but could not even faint.

"Clum is dead, — I killed him! Clum is dead, — I killed him!"

The words kept ringing in my ears as persistently as the ticking of a pendulum; and when I looked down upon Clum's pallid face, I thought of murdered Abel. How much better than Cain was I?

As the gentlemen lifted Clum out of the highway, his head fell back like that of a drowned boy I once saw at Quinnebasset. I shall never get over that sight! I know I screamed, — I could n't control myself.

"Soyez tranquille, soyez tranquille, ma petite!" said one of the men soothingly. "Il n'est pas mort."

And as he spoke Clum's eyes unclosed. It was as if the heavens had opened. Such a weight rolled off me I could almost have walked on air.

"You're alive, Clum, you know you are!" said I, laughing and crying in a breath, as I wiped the blood from his poor forehead. "I did n't kill you, did I?"

"Is it you, Vic? Are you hurt?" asked he, drowsily; and then he fainted again.

The gentlemen were very kind. They brought water from a cottage near; they tied up our splintered carriage, and laid Clum in it upon the cushions with his head upon my lap; they led back the horse, which, after

dragging Clum some distance by the reins, had stopped quietly to feed along the road-side. And when all was ready, one of them mounted the front seat and drove home to Paris. The other one went on in advance in the fiacre.

Oh, what a ride that was,—slow and solemn as a funeral procession! Sometimes Clum would rouse for a moment, but it was to sink back into a lethargy like death. I could only sit and hold his bleeding head in an agony of remorse. What had I done? How could I meet the Du Souchets?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VAN'S STORY.

"SPEAKING OF CLUM."

VIC came home in a dreadful state of mind. "I don't know but he's dead!" sobbed she, falling into my arms and breaking her hat-feather.

"Who?"

"Why, Clum! It's all owing to his French politeness, and my being so harum-scarum!"

I got her things off while she was talking,—her cloak was torn in slits,—and would have made her lie down, only that was impossible.

"He may die!" cried she, walking the floor. "I said I was 'going to lead him through a wilderness of hopes and fears,' oh, I tell you I thought of those words! O Van, I tell you I thought of those words!"

I tried to comfort her, but she broke away from me, wringing her hands.

"And there's Clum all still, with that great gash in his forehead, and they won't let me see him. They wouldn't let me see Helen. Dr. Zelie thinks I'm as light-headed as a butterfly; he won't let me go near Clum. I don't blame him, I don't blame Aunt Filura!

A girl that has been so wild! But, Van, that horse was vicious, — there was a white ring round his eye; and I never saw a horse you could trust that had a white ring round his eye! And now Clum's going to die, and without one word to say he forgives me!"

"O darling! I don't believe he'll die. What did Dr. Zelig say?"

"He says he doesn't know; why, Van, nobody knows. He says he thinks it's a flesh-wound; and then he put me back in the carriage and said the house must be still. Why must the house be still if it's only a flesh-wound?"

I locked Vic in the room long enough to go down to the infirmary for some tisane to quiet her nerves; and after drinking it the poor child grew calmer, and by and by dropped off to sleep.

Next morning, bright and early, Dr. Zelig came with good news of Clum.

"A sprained wrist; quite feverish and bruised; but thank Heaven! there's no danger in the case."

Then he turned his head away quickly, that we might not see the tears in his eyes. I think if the accident had proved fatal, none of the family, not even Clum's sisters, would have mourned him like Nunky; he was "his boy," you know. Vic was so grateful for the happy tidings that she appeared on the point of embracing Dr. Zelig, but controlled herself by a strong effort, and seemed remarkably collected, even cool.

"You girls must come over and see Clum by to-morrow; he'll be very lonesome," added the doctor, looking from Vic to me inquiringly. I fancy he did not know which of us Clum cared especially to see, for that

little cabinet-adventure had puzzled him; I had been sure of it from his manner ever since Clum ran away to Fontainebleau.

"Yes, we'll go by all means," said I; but Vic never answered.

For the whole day she was subdued, even meek; studying industriously, still not learning her lessons.

Next morning she took unusual pains with her toilet, expecting me to propose a visit to the Du Souchets'; so to tease her I said, "Well, shall we go to see your patient after lunch?" She turned round, quite indignant.

"After lunch? Won't it do as well after supper? You would n't be so cool if you'd broken a man's neck. Have you no feeling for Clum?"

"Perhaps I shall have more by and by, Vic. You know what you said the other day, — it's 'only a question of time between Clum and me.'"

Vic laughed, and re-arranged her neck-ribbon.

We found on reaching the Du Souchets' that Clum had had rather a restless night, and was still fast asleep; so we concluded to go back to school and return after lunch.

"It's just as well, Vic," said I, mischievously; "you've shown your interest in him, you know."

"My interest?" exclaimed she, taking alarm in a moment. "What interest have I shown in Clum beyond what's perfectly right and proper? I didn't even inquire for him, Van; 't was you that did all the talking."

"Oh, yes, so it was," said I, trying not to laugh.

"But speaking of Clum," said Vic, timidly, after a

pause, "don't you think we might get him some tamarinds or canned fruit, or something?"

"I don't see the least harm in it," said I.

"Only perhaps you'd better be the one to take it to him, Van, under the circumstances."

We bought some guava jelly and oranges; and to satisfy Vic, who seemed to be seized with a sudden sense of propriety, I put them in Aunt Filura's hands to be delivered to Clum. He was too weak and dizzy to sit up, but his uncle had helped him down-stairs, and he lay on the library sofa, looking very pale and handsome in a gray dressing-gown with violet trimmings.

We went up to him, and I knelt by the sofa, saying, "O Clum, how sorry we are for this!"

If other people had not been looking, I might have kissed him on his beautiful white forehead. I think it would have been proper "under the circumstances," and he would n't have minded it, for his eyes were on Vic.

She was very shy. She stood at the foot of the sofa, and only asked, "How do you feel now?" But all she could n't say was in her face,—a whole heart-full of tenderness and regret. She had no idea how eloquent she was without speech.

"Oh, I feel anyhow," replied Clum, with a very happy look, but turning fearfully pale.

"Don't be frightened, girls; he has a womanish trick of 'going off,' but it does n't hurt him a bit," said Dr. Zelig, parading a vial of ammonia.

"There now," said he, placing a chair beside Clum and seating Vic in it, "you won't talk to him much; but I shall have to take your sister away, she is such a chatterbox."

And he led me out of the little library into the parlor, and drew up a tête-à-tête before the grate. It was a remarkably chilly day for the season, and the fire wavered and flamed, and reached out its warm red fingers; there was a very home-like look about the room, and I felt well contented to sit there a while without Uncle Paoli, or even Aunt Filura and the girls; for it seemed a long while since I had seen Dr. Zelig, and he was in the mood for talking.

"I think it was as well we came away. We don't want to tamper with the divine order of things, do we, Evangeline?"

I looked up, and met a mischievous smile in his eye.

"Things seem to be coming to a pretty pass," he went on, with a good-humored frown. "Does n't it take you by surprise?"

"I hardly know what you mean," said I, with a sudden pang of jealousy. I could n't bear to have him put my own thoughts into words.

"I have seen the signs for some time," he went on,—"the sign of the shoe-blackening, and the sign of the hair-brush. I knew my boy was falling in love."

Here he poked the fire, and seemed to be smiling at his own thoughts.

"And I've been trying for some time to guess whether it was you or Vic."

"Oh, I think you might have known it was n't I, Dr. Zelig!"

"Might I? Well, yes, it would have been a most unaccountable thing if it had been you," said he, taking such a leisurely survey of me that I was glad when he began to talk again.

"That boy! Why, Evangeline, it's preposterous! He can't tell where his bread and butter is coming from next week."

"Can anybody tell that?"

"Well, there's a difference. Some people can form a reasonable conjecture as to theirs, and others can't. Clum belongs to the impecunious class decidedly."

"Oh, well" — said I, and stopped.

It all seemed so far off to me as yet, — so uncertain. I could not associate the thought of Clum and my dear sister with any strivings after bread and butter. I had only just begun to speculate in regard to their feelings for each other; and here was Dr. Zelig reaching into the future already to raise the question of money! What a hard, unromantic young man! He was just like these calculating Frenchmen, who find out what a girl's dowry is to be before they venture to propose. I felt greatly disappointed in Dr. Zelig.

"Clum is a thoughtless fellow," added he; "I'm not blaming him, but I say he is thoughtless. Yes, I know what you are thinking of: I was much more so at his age, say five years ago."

"O Dr. Zelig! I was n't thinking of that at all."

"Were n't you? I'm glad. I'd give a good deal if you'd never remember it again, as long as you live. But my affair has nothing to do with Clum. Do you think, Evangeline, a poor boy like that has any right to win your sister's affections?"

"Why, Dr. Zelig, as if she cared for money! It is dreadful to hear you talk so!"

"Ah, is it indeed?"

"Yes, sir, as if money were everything."

"Did I say it was everything? I thought I only intimated that a man has no right to think of matrimony till he can support a wife. You consider that necessary, do you, mademoiselle?"

"Why, Dr. Zelig, you spoke of money immediately, you know, as if it were all-important; and that I don't like!"

"Well, what is the all-important thing in this world, if it is n't money?"

"Why, you know, there are a thousand things better," said I, quite shocked at him.

"Well, name one."

"Doing good."

"Poh! what does that amount to? It's just money out of pocket. Did you ever hear of Dr. Laval, a surgeon-major of the French army?"

"No."

"I'll warrant it. Very few persons ever did. He was merely one of these simple-minded men that are bent on doing good. And what did he get by it? A nameless grave."

Here Dr. Zelig sprang forward and began to poke the fire again.

"He was stationed at Constantine, in Algeria, but had leave to go to Tunis to conduct botanical researches, and while there the plague broke out. What do you suppose he did then?"

"Well, most men would have run away."

"Not he," said Dr. Zelig, his eyes kindling; "he knew the plague was but little understood; and he chose to stay there and watch it, and search into its causes, for the sake of medical science."

"Did he die?"

"Of course he did! What else could he expect? But he had made discoveries which will live for ages to come. He left a diary and a complete set of notes, Evangeline. It is his only monument; but could you ask a better? I'd rather have it than Napoleon Bonaparte's or even Shakespeare's. I tell you 'the noblest service comes from nameless hands,' and such a life as Dr. Laval's is worth living, whether the world ever hears of him or not."

Carried away by his subject, Dr. Zelie forgot himself entirely. He had begun by praising worldliness, but ended with a eulogy on self-sacrifice. I was thinking how I would laugh at him for this, when our conversation was suddenly interrupted. Aunt Filura came in by the back entry with a cup of tea for Clum, just as Uncle Paoli entered from the hall; and they met in the middle of the room.

Aunt Filura had n't seen him before since the scene on the boat, and I suppose she was rather agitated by his unexpected appearance; for in greeting him she spilled a few drops of the hot tea on his hand.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Doggerty," said she, with a timely clutch at the spoon.

"O, it's no consequence, Filury," returned Uncle Paoli, rather maliciously. "Your hand's getting on-steady, but that's noways strange."

Then he inquired for Clum, evidently wishing it distinctly understood that his call was expressly upon him, and Aunt Filura ushered him at once into the library.

"See how you've made Mr. Daugherty forget his manners, Aunt Filura," said Dr. Zelie roguishly, when

she came back. "I never heard him twit anybody of infirmity before. I'm afraid your rejection has soured his disposition."

"Now, 'Zekiel," said she, with the greatest solemnity, "you don't really think I ought to marry Mr. Doggerty?"

Dr. Zelig dropped his teasing tone instantly. It was never of the least use to joke Miss Wix.

"Bless your heart, Aunt Filura, you're head and shoulders above him! I'd never forgive you if you consented to marry him."

The old sunny smile began to tremble around her mouth again. "Well, I want to feel that I'm bearing my share of burdens, and I don't know as I do right to be so comfortable and happy through life; but this did seem too much of a cross, and I can't make up my mind to it!"

Dr. Zelig and I both laughed; it was impossible to help it.

"His being sick and deaf don't stand in the way, 'Zekiel," said Aunt Filura, apologizing for herself; "you know that as well as I do. The trouble is, I could n't love him if I was to suffer!"

She spoke as earnestly as a young girl. As if marrying for love were a possible thing at her time of life! I didn't wonder it amused Vic, who came out of the library at that moment with such a radiant face that I had to tease her on the way home.

"Look happy, do I? Why, what are you thinking of, Van?" said she, trying to sigh. "You mean I look wretched. Why, here I am lamenting like Lamech, 'I've slain a man to my hurt and a young man to my undoing.'"

CHAPTER XXIX.

VIC'S STORY.

A DOUBLE-HEADER.

"There is no pardon for desecrated ideals."

"**H**E'S just like twitch-grass, Van ; you can 't annihilate him ; he's always springing up where you least expect him."

It was the day after our visit to Clum, and I was speaking of Mr. Ulmer. Uncle Paoli had dropped in the night before and told us of his arrival in Paris.

"I tell you, Van, when Uncle Paoli said, 'Lucius has come,' it startled me like a torpedo."

"Maybe you won't have to meet him, Vic. We'll keep snug in the house till —"

And then came the knock. Van went to the door, and came back with a card.

"It's for you, Vic."

"Don't you give it to me, Van," cried I, stabbing at her in the air. "It's another torpedo, I know by your face. I won't see Lucius Ulmer ! I will not !"

"No, no, Vic ; it is n't Mr. Ulmer."

"Oh, then, I don't care. 'Come one, come all, this rock shall fly,' etc., 'as soon as I.' Only who is it

that wants to see me minus my better half? They'd better not."

"Mr. Theobold, Vic."

"Little Theodora! Van Asbury, that's a double-header!"

And down I dropped upon the dictionary, ready to faint.

"Why, Vic, what ails you? I thought you liked Mr. Theobold."

Yes, and he thought so too; that was the worst of it. Van did n't know about that scene in the castle-tower the last evening that Mr. Theobold and I spent together in Heidelberg. It had been on my conscience ever since, every once in a while, I mean, and now it came back to me with new force, — how I had been carried away by the music and the moonlight and the romance of our position up there by ourselves among the clouds, to say and let Mr. Theobold say foolish things.

"Is there then no death to a word once spoken?"

"You thought I liked Theodora, did you, Van?" said I, brushing savagely at my crimps. "Well, I did last summer; but who wants asparagus all the year round?"

"You're losing a hair-pin," was Van's pertinent rejoinder. "Here's your clean handkerchief."

"You come with me, Van. I think you might."

But of course she would n't. She had n't been asked for; besides, I don't suppose she had the least idea how I hated to meet Mr. Theobold alone. But I did n't have to, for in the lower hall I came upon Aunt Filura Wix. She had run in to tell me about Columbus, she

said ; she knew I was a good deal worried, and would be anxious to hear.

She never mentioned Van ; she seemed to consider that I was the one chiefly interested. "Columbus had had a tumbling night," she said ; "his arm had pained him considerable ; but he was sleeping quietly then, and she had clapped on her things and come out to get the air."

"You look tired to death, Aunt Filura," said I, helping her throw back her veil. I wanted to keep her in the hall a moment till she had said all there was to say about Clum.

"Oh no, not so bad as that, Victoria," said she cheerfully, laboring with her bonnet-strings, — they had got caught under her scarf when she clapped it on, — "I don't feel to complain a mite, I feel such a sense of thankfulness that Columbus was spared to us. The Lord's hand was in it."

"But I had a hand in upsetting the carriage," said I, shivering. "O Aunt Filura ! if I had killed Clum I never could have lived through it."

"Poor child ! you've suffered a good deal as it is," said she compassionately, stooping over me almost as if she were going to take me in her arms, but immediately giving up the idea. She wouldn't have known what to do with me. She seldom indulged in caresses ; I think she felt herself incompetent, and that was why this half-motion of hers had surprised me so. Besides, I knew I had never been a favorite with her as Van had. If she was getting to like me now, it must be partly because I had done something I was sorry for, and partly, maybe, for Clum's sake. She fancied he was interested in me, Van said.

"Yes, it has been trying for you, and it's been trying for Columbus," she went on, following me along the hall; "but I haven't a doubt good'll come out of it somehow to both of you. When the Lord handles us roughly I always feel it's to fashion us into better shape."

"Yes'm," said I, hurriedly, my hand on the latch. "Mr. Theobold's in here, Aunt Filura. He's come back to Paris, it seems, and he called — very naturally."

And then we went in, Aunt Filura first; it was easier to meet Mr. Theobold so, — under her shadow.

She shook hands with him very heartily, and inquired for his health; thought he had improved since he first came to Europe, he didn't look so "ashy." But where was his sister? why didn't she call too?

Mr. Theobold colored. Ann was quite well, he said, but fatigued by the journey. They had only reached Paris the night before.

"I thought you intended to remain in Heidelberg — no, Stuttgart — during the winter," said I, confusedly. Whereupon he colored again, and said they had talked of doing so, but preferred Paris.

"Where's Vandelia?" said Aunt Filura bluntly, when we were all seated. "Has she got one of her sick headaches?"

"Oh, no, I'll call her." I started up, but before I could reach the door it opened, and I stood face to face with Lucius Ulmer!

It was as if I had called up an avenging spirit instead of calling Van. I had n't presence of mind enough to speak or to run away; I just stared straight at Mr. Ulmer like a somnambulist.

But he was n't scared a bit. Nothing ever frightened him out of his manners. He greeted me as easily and cordially as if we had parted the warmest friends in the world, and then he went over to speak to Aunt Filura and Mr. Theobold, giving me time to recover myself.

"How is Columbus, Miss Wix? Uncle Paoli told me of the accident, and I was very sorry to hear it, but thankful it was no worse. Why Victoria, it might have been the death of you!" he added, turning to me. "I shudder every time I think of it."

I would n't have minded his shuddering if he had n't spoken in such an affectionate, confident tone, as if he had the peculiar and exclusive right to shudder over me. After what had passed between us at Heidelberg it was the coolest impudence I ever heard of! But I might have expected it. I might have known Lucius Ulmer by that time. If an idea once took root in his mind you could n't draw it out with oxen, and I had been "growing into his affections for two years"; that was what he had said in his last letter. Oh, it was too discouraging!

"I'm afraid the fall did injure you more than you think, Victoria," said he, with an air of solicitude, sitting down upon the sofa beside me. "You're looking more like a white rose than I could wish."

What was it to him whether I looked like a white rose or a pink hollyhock? I would n't sit there to be wished over!

Aunt Filura rose, too, in a bewildered way. She'd better go, she said. She would n't stop to see Vandelia. Columbus might be wanting something.

"We'll run over to-morrow to inquire for him," said I.

"Well," replied Aunt Filura; and it was every word she said. But she gave me a sorrowful, troubled look, as much as to say, "I can't understand all this that's going on, Victoria, but I guess you'd better keep away from Columbus. I'm jealous that you've been flirting with some of these young men."

She went away, and I took out my handkerchief and squeezed it and put it back in my pocket, and then remarked to Mr. Theobold that it was cooler in Paris than at Heidelberg, whereat he looked incredulous.

"That is, I mean it is colder here now than it was there last summer. It was very warm there sometimes, you know."

"Very warm, certainly."

"Have you had a pleasant autumn?"

"For the most part, yes."

Then followed another pause, for Mr. Theobold was ill at ease, and I would n't address a remark to Mr. Ulmer if I never said anything. It was perfectly exasperating to see him sitting there twirling his mustache, as entirely at home as McGregor on his native heath. I don't know how he did it, for he was gentlemanly enough, but he certainly made it seem as if it were only he that had the right to call on me, and Mr. Theobold was intruding.

That enraged me, and incited me to do my best at entertaining Mr. Theobold, who had the least self-assertion of any man I ever met; but I could n't make him feel comfortable, and he left very soon.

As the door closed behind him Mr. Ulmer rose and



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took a chair beside me. I braced myself for battle. The slogan was in the air ; I knew it.

"Victoria, you have treated me singularly, very singularly."

No question asked. No answer.

"I suppose some men might have been seriously offended by your conduct, Victoria, and never forgiven it. But I can make allowances for your extreme sensitiveness. Haven't I always told you I understood you better than you understood yourself?" said he, with a magnanimous smile.

I opened my eyes.

"Your impulsive nature leads you into absurdities sometimes, as at Heidelberg, when I startled you by coming upon you unexpectedly. By the way, that was a piquant little letter of yours, *ma petite reine*."

"Piquant, Mr. Ulmer?"

"Yes, too spicy, almost. I won't deny that I was angry when I first read it, though on second thought I knew you could n't half mean it. You would be surprised at it yourself if you should read it now."

"But, Mr. Ulmer —"

"As I was saying, on second thought I knew you wrote hastily, under Miss Van's influence, probably. It was too absurd to believe that after being apparently happy in an engagement for so long, you should suddenly want to break it."

"But, Mr. Ulmer, I do want to break it. I considered it broken. I do not care for you as much as I supposed."

He smiled incredulously, and leaned forward to adjust a hair-pin about to fall from my crimps.

"Don't worry your little head any more about it at present, Victoria. You're morbid on that point. You'll realize in time that you love me more than you know."

Well, really, there was humility for you! If Mr. Ulmer did n't understand his native tongue, how could I convey an idea to him? Could I have put my refusal into plainer English?

Just then Madame Rey glided into the salon, all airs and elephantine graces, and sat down at a little distance from us at her hem-stitching. Etiquette at her establishment proscribed tête-à-têtes with young gentlemen, and she knew by instinct, I believe, when one was in progress.

I went right on; and if madame had understood English perfectly, I believe I should have gone on all the same, I was so excited.

"Truly I don't love you, Mr. Ulmer. I thought I did, but I don't. I ought never to have been engaged to you."

Mr. Ulmer's eyes flashed.

"Then you are interested in this Theobald that I always find in your neighborhood?"

"No, no, Mr. Ulmer, nothing of the kind; indeed, you've nobody to be angry with but myself. I've been very naughty, and I'm very, very sorry."

"We'll speak of this again at some more favorable time," said he, hastily rising, with a glance at madame. "Good night. *Au revoir.*"

"Don't speak of it again, please don't," I cried. "Forgive me, and let me go!"

But he only repeated "*Au revoir,*" with a graceful bow.

I waited in the salon for the hall-door to close behind him, and in that moment Madame Rey came to me and patted me playfully on the shoulder.

"Ah, you little English!" said she in French, with a gay laugh. "Ah! but you are very cruel to the gentlemen. Have a care, my dear. The Frenchmen do not love reproof. Is it that the Americans are more amiable, that you do not fear to offend them?"

"Van," said I, "it's of no use. You might as well say 'No' to a hand-organ as to Mr. Ulmer. It has n't the least effect on him. He keeps grinding out, 'Hear me, Norma,' just the same."

"Mr. Ulmer, — was *he* there?"

"Yes, and Aunt Filura. O Van Asbury! I thought I should die."

The next morning Mr. Ulmer called, and I would n't see him; then he inquired for Van, and she begged to be excused. I peeped from behind the curtain as he went down the path.

"You imagine he's suppressed, do you, Van? but he is n't, I know by his gait. He does n't believe in being refused. 'No negatives preserved,' that's his motto."

"What a wretched photographer he'd make, would n't he?" said Van, laughing.

That afternoon he sent me a letter, heavy as a state document. "Send it back, don't break the seal," said my precious Van, with a happy inspiration, and I obeyed.

"There! that must be the end of it," said she, and I thought so too. But it was n't the end of my letters that day. I had another from Clum, written in bed -

with a pencil. Clarice handed it to me after school, when Vic had gone to call on Miss Theobold. I can remember every line, for each word cut me like a razor:—

“Dear Victoria,” it ran, “I want to relieve your mind of any further apprehensions from this quarter. I’m not the fellow to petition for a third of a girl’s affections. If you’re in two deep already, that’s *too deep* for me, but I wish you had given me a hint of your love-affairs, and then I would have spared Van that offer by proxy. Please excuse the pencil: I cannot manage a pen with only one hand. Yours truly, Columbus Du Souchet.”

“Why, what is the matter, Vic?” said Van, coming in and finding my eyes as red as two cherries.

“Something that’ll keep forever, Van! Tell me first about the Theobolds”

“I only saw Miss Ann.”

“Well, she spoke to you, I suppose. Hold up your head like a lady, and tell me what she said. Anything about me?”

“Well, Vic, she looked at me very sharply when she said Edward was possessed to come to Paris this fall. She would have preferred remaining at Stuttgart. But I can’t think, Vic, it can be true what she hinted, that you—”

“Speak it right out,” said I. “Heap it all on. Bury me so I can’t find my way out. I never want to see the light of day again. O Van! O Van!”

CHAPTER XXX.

VAN'S STORY.

"THE LITTLE HUMBLE PLACE."

"Humility's so good
When pride's impossible."

— *Mrs. Browning.*

IT did seem as if Vic, like nations, was having her punishment in this world. Whether Mr. Ulmer did it from malice or not I can't say; but at this late date, when she supposed the engagement to be null and void, he spoke of it to his Uncle Paoli and the Du Souchets as a settled thing.

Uncle Paoli was "beat" (we heard of this afterwards from Henriette); he "knew Lucius had taken quite a shine to Victory one while, but thought it had all blown over long ago." He exhibited a great deal of temper, feeling, as he naturally would, that Lucius, who was entirely dependent on him, had no right to make his own choice of a wife.

"O Van!" said Vic, "they are talking me over at the Du Souchets', and I never shall seem the same to any of them again. Aunt Filura means to be kind, but I can see she has 'no opinion' of me, and even dear little Clarice turns the cold shoulder. O Van, my heart will break!"

She did not speak of Clum, but I knew she felt the

change in him to be hardest of all. Dr. Zelig was the only one who retained the old cordiality, and even in his case it was tempered with pity, or so Vic fancied ; and to a proud-spirited girl like her, pity is almost as galling as blame.

"I wish I was in old Quinnebasset," sighed she, "where I could lie down and go to sleep under the willows, and never wake up."

My heart ached for the poor child. "I do say, Vic, when you had truly repented, and never meant to do such a thing again, it does seem hard to have your old sins thrown in your face," said I, hotly. But Vic answered with a meekness truly surprising.

"No, Van, it's good enough for me ; I deserve every bit of it. Why, when I look back upon the light-hearted girl I was two years ago, and then look at myself now, — a double-dealing hypocrite, — I feel like Dives in torment looking up at Lazarus."

"O Vic ! don't talk so, you have n't meant any harm," said I, taking her in my arms.

Vic and I were like two buckets in a well, — when one was going down the other was always coming up ; it would n't do for both to be low-spirited together.

"Well, no, I have n't really meant any harm, Van, but I have n't meant any good either. I've felt about as much responsibility as a summer zephyr ; and is that the way for a human being to behave?"

"Oh, well, Vic, you're young." It was really all I could think of to say.

"Well, ole lady, you were young once yourself, but you never got in such a predicament as this !" said she, bringing down her clenched fists upon the table.

"Good reason for it, Vic ; I never had any admirers."

"No, but you 've had respecters," groaned she, "and that's a great deal better."

"Vic, I wonder you're not more indignant towards Ann Theobold for talking as she does about you. As if you had ever said or done anything to warrant her brother Edward in coming back to Paris !"

"Oh, but I'm afraid that's true," said Vic ; and then she told me of the scene in the tower.

"Why, Vic, that was the very day —"

"On which I came to my senses," said she, stamping her foot. "Yes, it was the very same hour that Lucius Ulmer called at Fräulein Zipp's. Things have always been tumbling over one another just so in my life, Van, all hurry-skurry. But it is my opinion that on that memorable occasion my mind waked up from a sound sleep."

"Well, Vic, I do think you've been different ever since. And now you'll talk with Edward and set him right?"

"Yes," said she, sobbing on my shoulder. "I won't ask you to ravel out any more of my knitting-work, Van. When Edward Theobold calls here again, I'll talk with him myself, if it kills me, — and him too."

I had never seen Vic like this before. She scarcely ate or slept, but walked the room, singing Mother Goose melodies to the tune of "Old Hundred," or the most solemn verses to the liveliest dance music, — she had to express herself in some way, or die, like Irving's dumb bird, "of imprisoned fulness."

What made it all the harder for her was our being shut up in the house, for we dared not appear on the

street for fear of meeting Mr. Ulmer. We actually hurried back to our room after meals, as if we expected he would "appear to us" in the passage; and one morning early, as Vic accidentally ran against the servant-man, who was skating across the hall with soap strapped to his feet, polishing the floor, she screamed and almost fell.

"Oh! dear," said she, scrambling up, "I've come to think every man, woman, or child is Lucius Ulmer."

I knew she longed for daily news of Clum, but nothing would have induced her to call at the Du Souchets', even if we had ventured out.

On Sunday we kept our room. What a long day that was! The French girls, after singing devoutly in the chapel, began to romp and jump rope in the yard, and we could hear the sound of workmen's hammers on a building next door. If anything, it was livelier than on week-days; but we had learned by this time not to expect the beautiful quiet of a New England Sabbath at Madame Rey's.

Vic sat by the half-hour with her Bible in her lap, reading through falling tears. She had had an interview the evening before with Mr. Theobold, which had left her more wretched than ever.

"It seems as if a demon of the blackest heart could n't have contrived to torment people worse than I've done. Am I selfish, Van? We always thought sister Sharly was selfish: am I like her?"

"Not a bit, dear; you are simply thoughtless."

"Well, am I capable of thinking? Is there anything to me?"

"Why, Vic, what a question!"

"It's about time I asked it. Seems as if my mind was loose and sandy, like the soil of Sahara Desert. What is there at the bottom of it, — anything?"

"Hard pan," said I, laughing.

"What's that?"

"Why, the stratum of earth that the soil lies on is called pan, you know. And really, Vic, your sandiness isn't very deep, and there's the pan of common-sense under it; so don't be discouraged."

"You little comfort!" said Vic, coming over and kissing me. "What do you suppose folks do when they lose all their self-esteem, and have n't any twin sisters to prop them up?"

How pale she looked, — every bit of the pretty color gone out of her cheeks, as if her tears had washed it away!

"I don't know whether it's spirituality or only blues," said she, trying to laugh; "but, Van, I do almost feel as if I'd got to 'the little humble place' the old lady told of in prayer-meeting."

"Well, I believe you, dear."

"Don't you remember," said she, timidly, as if the subject were too sacred to be handled, — "don't you remember you told me once something Aunt Filura said in regard to — to — becoming religious? What was it, Van?"

"Put your arms round God's neck and call him father, and try to obey him."

"Well, but the conversion?"

"Is n't that conversion?"

"Well, but there's a strait gate to pass through."

"Is n't the 'little humble place' the strait gate?"

"Oh, but you must experience religion."

"Aunt Filura says that's of no use unless you keep experiencing it."

"Well, but how do you get hold of it in the first place? That's what I want to know."

"Don't wait for any feelings,—they will come by and by,—but do the very best you can in every single thing, and ask your Father's help about it. That's what she calls going to school to Christ."

"Was that the way she did?"

"So she says."

"Well, she has certainly become a beautiful Christian. What a light there is in her face!"

"Yes, indeed."

Vic sat in deep thought for a few minutes.

"Uncle Paoli says Aunt Filura is n't over-sound in doctrine," said she, "and I suppose he is as sound as a nut. But, however, moreover, notwithstanding, I'd rather have her religion than his."

"His appears to be the religion of the head," said I.

"Yes," responded Vic, "and it has never gone down into his heart to get warm. Now, Van—"

There was a knock at the door, which sent our hearts into our mouths, but it was only a card from Dr. Zelig for both of us. Vic's eyes were so red that she would not go down.

"Well," said the doctor, as I entered the salon "I know I shall be welcome this time, for I bring good news."

"O Dr. Zelig! I always expect something pleasant when you call,—ever since that despatch about little Morris. But what is it now?"

"There, you reward me for coming before you know my errand. That's generous! Well, I met Mr. Daugherty a few minutes ago, and he told me Mr. Ulmer left yesterday for Rome. Are you glad of that?"

"Oh, very, very! And it was kind of you to come and tell us. But how did you know we should be glad? I supposed Mr. Ulmer had informed everybody that he and Vic were engaged."

"Oh, no; he reports that the engagement is suspended for a season."

"Suspended indeed! Why, it's broken into a thousand pieces, Dr. Zelig."

"Is it? I'm really glad to hear it."

"Only Mr. Ulmer won't take 'No' for an answer. Vic says his motto is, 'No negatives preserved.'"

Dr. Zelig laughed, and looked delighted.

"He is an immensely conceited fellow. But he is out of the way now. Do you know how your face has lighted up since you heard that?"

"No; has it?"

"And so Mr. Theobald is the happy man?"

"Oh, no, Dr. Zelig! That's a great mistake, and I'm glad to correct it," said I, feeling that in one sense I certainly was glad, but in another I was very much ashamed to be talking these things over with some one outside the family, a young gentleman too. "There's nothing whatever between Vic and Mr. Theobald, and never will be."

"Ah! is that so?"

"Yes, sir," said I, my cheeks burning very uncomfortably. "I want everybody to know this for Vic's sake. You can see, sir, it is n't pleasant for Vic to be continually misunderstood by her friends."

"No. And you, her little champion, would like to have me repeat what you say to Aunt Filura and the rest of the family: is that what you mean?"

"Yes, sir, if you will be so good. She has been very thoughtless, Dr. Zelig; but if you suppose she is heartless, you are entirely mistaken. She has come to her senses now, and is dreadfully ashamed of it all."

"Poor girl! She has been made cruelly conspicuous, and it is a downright shame," said he, looking very sympathetic; "but perhaps this exposure was the very thing she needed; it may be a turning-point in her life."

"Ah! what if it should be?" thought I.

"Dr. Holmes says we know very little of the contents of our minds till a sudden jar brings them to light," continued Dr. Zelig, "as an earthquake that shakes down a miser's house brings out the stockings full of gold and all the hoards that have been hidden away in holes and crannies. There's a great deal in Vic, and I dare say it will come out now."

"Oh, I like to hear you say that, Dr. Zelig. It's so easy to turn against people when they do wrong, and to say, 'Just as I expected.'"

"Oh, well, I'll stand up for Vic always, if you'll thank me with such a smile as that! But I was going to ask if you'd both like to attend church with me this evening."

"I'd be very glad, and I'm sure Vic would. Why, Dr. Zelig, we've stayed a week in this castle—portcullis down and draw-bridge up—for fear of meeting Mr. Ulmer."

"And you have kept as close as Vic?"

"Oh, yes."

"It's what I call Chinese justice," said he, laughing, and running his fingers through his hair.

"What's that, pray?"

"Why, when a Chinese murderer is hanged, all his family are hanged with him; and you and Vic manage on the same principle. Whenever she does wrong and suffers for it, you have to suffer too, don't you?"

"I would n't give much for myself if I did n't. But O Dr. Zelig! I've forgotten to ask about Clum. How could I when I think of him so much?"

"Well, Clum wears his left arm in a sling, and goes about looking pale, but feeling pretty comfortable physically, I think."

"Isn't he comfortable mentally, then?" asked I, not daring to look up.

"Judging from appearances, no; but as he is one of the reticent sort I can only guess at it. You and I were rather hasty in the conclusions we drew about him and Vic the other day, were n't we?"

"I think it was you who drew the conclusions."

"Right, so it was. I wish you knew my boy better," said Dr. Zelig, enthusiastically. "I never saw a young man with a higher ideal of womanhood, and for that very reason he can't abide flirting. I've heard him say he doesn't believe a true-hearted girl will flirt."

"Alas for Vic, then!" thought I.

"So I know this has been a great blow to him, Evangeline, — a great blow."

"Yes, sir, I see, and oh, I'm so sorry!"

"He has heard the worst side of the story, without any of the extenuating circumstances, so he is n't likely to have much charity," added the doctor.

"But you'll talk with him, and let him see Vic is n't so very bad after all. I can't bear she should lose his friendship. Oh, please, Dr. Zelig!"

"Bless your little heart! Do you suppose I won't do the best I can in this case?—for your sake," said he, taking my hand and holding it a moment while he said good-by.

I wondered all the way up-stairs if he meant to imply that he would do anything for my sake that he would n't do for Vic's; and by the time I reached our room I was a little confused in my mind, not fairly remembering I had two messages to deliver.

"What an everlasting while you've been gone!" said Vic.

"About five minutes, dear."

But she proved to me by her watch that it had been half an hour.

CHAPTER XXXI.

VIC'S STORY.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

“**T**o Fontainebleau? What, the whole family! Who proposed it?”

“Dr. Zelig.”

I could see that Van looked pleased; and for a moment I blamed her for wanting to go and drag me among the critics who were talking me over, especially as I had n't seen Clum since his dreadful letter. Then I gave myself a mental shaking, and thought it was too bad to deprive my kind sister of any pleasure.

“I must meet Clum some time,” said I, arguing the point with my self-respect, “and it may as well be to-day for aught I know.”

So we made our toilets. It was two weeks from the Saturday after Mr. Ulmer had the goodness to leave Paris, — I remember that perfectly.

“There, Van, give me a sisterly survey,” said I. “How do I look?”

“Dainty as an apple-blossom,” said the partial creature. “You always do.”

“Thank you. If I *am* in the Valley of Humiliation, I mean to prance through it in high-heeled shoes, and not look like an object of pity.”

"But is my back hair right?" asked Van.

It was lovely, and so was Van that morning. She was beginning lately to care a great deal more about her dress. We had paused a moment outside the salon to be mutually surveyed; and, this over, we opened the door and went in to meet the Du Souchets, who had called for us. Uncle Paoli was with them; we had known that beforehand by the impatient tapping of his cane.

"We did n't mean to invite him; he is n't well enough to go," said Clum to Van, after greeting us both with a cool "Good-morning."

It seemed to occur to him next minute that he had hardly been polite to me, so he shook hands, saying, "It's a charming day, Vic."

Ah! a month ago he would have said that with a smile and a bow that would have made the words seem like a personal compliment. I saw but too well that the reign of Victoria was over!

"Yes," continued Clum to Van, as Henriette and I walked behind them to the depot, "this is Aunt Filly's birthday, and we wanted it to be a real red-letter day to her; but before we could get away Uncle Paoli happened over and stepped into our arrangements."

"Into yours too, Van," said I, speaking up, to show I was n't crushed. "Of course you'll feel him on your shoulders. I never saw Uncle Paoli's equal for stepping into everybody's arrangements at once,—you'd think he must be web-footed."

"A duck of a man, in other words," said Clum, coldly.

Well, if he was, I must confess he gave no hint of

wings that day. His irritability was positively amusing to all of us but Aunt Filura, who had him on her conscience, I suppose, and was continually getting repulsed in her efforts to make him comfortable. When she asked him in the rail-car if there was too great a draught, he turned up his coat-collar with an air of martyrdom, saying, "*Perhaps* he could stand it. He was n't used to sitting in a gale of wind, but the rest were, it seemed. No matter if he did add to his cold."

Of course that brought down all the windows, and we felt as if we were shut into a handbox.

Then, on leaving the train, he would n't let Dr. Zelig put him into a carriage. "If the women-folks wanted to risk their necks with those rascally drivers, it was their own lookout; for his part he should n't countenance 'em."

It ended in our all walking through the forest.

I lagged on behind, like an afterthought, with Uncle Paoli, who had offered me his arm rather petulantly the mement he saw Van spirited away by Dr. Zelig. He was very punctilious about offering his arm whenever there was the ghost of an occasion for it; and I would n't have hurt him by refusing it,—though the rheumatic hitch in his gait to-day made it about as easy to keep step with him as it would be to keep step with a camel. Indeed, it had come to this,—that I was rather thankful than otherwise for Uncle Paoli's escort. Without him I must either have walked alone or "put myself round in the way"; for they were all divided off by twos,—Aunt Filura and Clum, with that poor left arm of his in a sling; Van and Dr. Zelig; and Clarice and

Henriette, who were evidently enjoying a confidential chat. Query ; was it about me ?

I heard Clum say to Aunt Filura, "That's a tall man coming "

"Why, Columbus, that's a stump," replied she.

Whereupon Henriette laughed heartlessly, and exclaimed, "Put on your spectacles, Clum !"

He did it, and looked very dignified. I thought them remarkably becoming, but they changed him to me more than ever, and made me feel as if he could see every expression in my face, with his back turned.

It was late autumn, and some of the trees were glowing and flushing in a perfect blaze of glory. I heard Clum and Aunt Filura calling the different varieties by name ; but Uncle Paoli's remarks were almost lost upon me. I think he said something about not having married again, for I caught the familiar words, "There's where I missed it, Victory." I suppose he had not the least idea his adventure with Aunt Filura was known and "talked over" in the family. Poor old soul ! For the first time since I had known him I did not feel like laughing at him. Is it true, then, that "a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind" ? I had never given the man credit for any good quality, but I had to own now that he possessed some of the instincts of a gentleman ; for, indignant as I know he felt towards me, he made no allusion to my relations with Lucius.

By the time we reached the palace he was greatly fatigued, and we sat on the steps to rest before making the tour of the rooms.

"What a grand good thing it is for the public to have such a beautiful place to come to !" mused Aunt

Filura, fanning herself vigorously with the corner of her shawl.

"I wonder at you, Filury, standing up for this extravagance," growled Uncle Paoli, referring to his guide-book, and keeping the place with his cane. "Now here's the chap that started this stone-work, — Francis I, wa' n't it? What business had he squandering his subjects' money in such tomfoolery? I don't know what *you* call it: *I* call it swindling."

"I suppose he was more lavish than what a faithful steward ought to be," said Aunt Filura reflectively, with a patient tug at her retreating bonnet. "Still, don't you think the lift he gave to painting and architecture was most an excellent thing?"

"What's the use of pictered walls, Filura, tell me that? They ain't a speck warmer, without it is that the oil keeps out the damp some."

"The Lord thought it worth while to adorn the walls of his firmament," said Aunt Filura, reverently. "However, I know it's a question how much men are justified in laying out just to please the eye. But I always felt if Francis I had never done anything worse than to beautify his kingdom, he might have left an honest record. It was his going to war so that ruined him"

"H'm!" sniffed Uncle Paoli energetically, diving into his guide-book for instruction. He wasn't at home in history, like Aunt Filura, but while he had the spirit of a man he would contradict. His manner was so droll that I involuntarily glanced towards Clum to see if he appreciated it, and as I looked down he looked up; but he immediately dropped his head, as

much as to say, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity!"

"Louis XV finished the structer," observed Uncle Paoli, peering over his spectacles with an air of learning. "That was about all he was fit for, wa' n't it, doctor, — to build block houses?"

"And gamble," said Dr. Zelig good-naturedly, drawing Van's wrap about her, for the wind was chilly. I dragged mine up over my shoulders myself: there was nobody to make a fuss over me; I might shiver on the upper step with Uncle Paoli as long as I pleased, without disturbing Clum's serenity. Certainly, his treatment of me was a study. Without being in the least rude, he yet contrived to make me feel that I was of no more interest to him than a fly. I knew I had been a naughty, wicked girl, and deserved to suffer, but it did seem too hard to receive my discipline from Clum. But if I was forgotten, Uncle Paoli was n't, at least by Aunt Filura.

"Mr. Duggerty," exclaimed she, starting up hastily, "if you're anyways rested, seems to me we'd better be going over the palace. I'm afraid you run a risk of catching cold here."

"Yes, and so do you," said Uncle Paoli, resentfully. "You can't stand what you could once, I find, Filury."

"This old building has had an eventful history," said Dr. Zelig, leading the way with Van. "Think of its former gayeties and splendors,—its tragedies too. Christina of Sweden had her grand equerry executed here. You remember?"

"Yes, Uncle Zeke; but the palace had a religious spasm a short century or so after that," said Clum.

"Pope Pius VII lived here two years with his cardinals."

"A set of lying Catholics!" grumbled Uncle Paoli, bent on putting in a word whenever he was sure of his ground.

"Not so very bad, perhaps, Mr. Daugherty, in their early days," laughed Clum; "but they warped in seasoning. The times were hot, you know."

"Poh! I can't swallow a Catholic, young or old," retorted Uncle Paoli.

"Dyspepsia has marked him for its own, you see," murmured Clum, who could no more help joking than he could help breathing.

"Yes, those were hot times all the world over," meditated Aunt Filura, thrusting her elbow into a cobweb. "We were having our war of 1812, and France was up in arms too. Let me see, it was n't more 'n a year or two after that that Napoleon signed his first abdication; right in this building, was n't it, C'lumbus?"

"If you say so, of course it was," said he affectionately, brushing off the cobweb. "There never was such a woman for remembering dates."

"What say?" said Mr. Daugherty, wheeling me short round, face to face with Clum and Aunt Filura. "Oh, well, a good memory is a gift to be thankful for, but it's no credit to your aunt or anybody else, as I know of."

So he went on all day, giving little hateful flings, especially at Aunt Filura; but instead of being vexed with him the blessed woman was overflowing with pity.

"Mr. Doggerty is sick, you may depend," said she,

by and by, as we were taking lunch at a booth under the trees. "His nerves are upset. I know how it was with me when I had that slow fever; Polly must have had a trial with me."

"As though the very slowest kind of fever ever could put you out of patience, Auntie! I don't believe a word of it."

"Don't you flatter me, Victoria," said she, with a grave smile, "I'm too weak to bear it."

But I think it did her good to be appreciated a little. I don't know that she acknowledged it, even to herself, but Van and I could see she had had her tribulations at the Du Souchets', particularly with Henriette, who had n't always been quite respectful, when Clum and Dr. Zelig were not by. She was learning now to love Aunt Filura, though often annoyed by her fantastic proceedings. For instance, at this very moment the dear saint had pinned the ties of her bonnet over the crown, out of the way of falling crumbs, and the ends flopped down on either side, like the ears of a King Charles spaniel.

"She looks as if her head was in a sling like Clum's arm," whispered Henriette, as Aunt Filura crossed to the next seat, with a glass of water for Clarice. "Why will she be so *outré*?"

"If I could be as good as she is, I believe I'd willingly be as awkward," said I, and I meant it. "Why, she is one of the salt of the earth."

"*Certainement*, and so was Lot's wife," returned Henriette, lifting her eyebrows; "but both are a little stiff, you know."

"What's the drift of the sermon, Henriette?" asked

Dr. Zelig, sauntering up to us from speaking with an acquaintance.

"Oh, nothing much, Nunky," said she, blushing; "only here's a young lady thinks Auntie is such an angel it's no matter how she holds her elbows."

"That's so," returned Dr. Zelig, rather sharply. "When a woman is walking straight towards heaven, her gait and carriage are of mighty little consequence. Evangeline is right."

"Only it was n't Van that said it," rejoined Henriette, mischievously; "'t was Vic."

Dr. Zelig looked a trifle embarrassed, but came towards me with a sudden glance of approval, and was about to speak, when Aunt Filura hurried up to him, exclaiming anxiously, "Look at Mr. Doggerty, 'Zekiel! He has n't an atom of color. Had n't you better ask him if he's sick? It'll put him out if I do."

Uncle Paoli did look ghostly. We had n't observed him before, as, after drinking his chocolate, he had taken a seat at some distance. Dr. Zelig went up to him at once, and inquired if he were ill.

"I should think any doctor might see that without asking," said he, peevishly. "I'd ought to have been home and abed an hour ago, but naterally I'm the last one to be considered."

Of course that made a general commotion. Dr. Zelig brought some wine; Clum called a carriage, and put Uncle Paoli into it; and in an amazingly short space we were all on the train on our way back to Paris.

By the time we reached his "apartments" in the city Uncle Paoli seemed considerably revived, though he was forced to let Dr. Zelig and Clum help him up to

his room. They prevailed upon him to lie down, and then Dr. Zelie came into the little parlor below, where Aunt Filura and Van and I were waiting.

"I don't apprehend anything serious at present," said he, "but I can't tell; he got over-fatigued with walking, and may have taken cold. He is more feeble than I supposed. If you'll excuse me, ladies, I'll stay with him a while, and resign you to 'my boy.'"

He said "ladies," but I observed he looked only at Van. I walked home in rather a subdued state of mind. We were all tired with the sight of so many pictures and so much splendor, and in no very sociable mood. After we dropped Aunt Filura and the girls at their house, Clum and Van did all the talking by little disconnected remarks, and I only listened.

"Had Uncle 'Zeke said anything about having Van look through a telescope? Had n't? Well, he meant to; he thought she would enjoy it."

Enjoy it! She would rather do it than have a new bonnet, anybody might know.

"And perhaps you would like it, Vic?"

Oh, yes, perhaps I would. I was very glad he took the trouble to ask!

As we stopped at our own door the sun sent some broad, slanting rays, and I seemed to see Clum under a halo. It was like the beautiful image I had of him in my mind after I killed him at Place de la Concorde,—as of something higher and nobler than myself. How bitterly he had been disappointed in me! I remembered he had said a year ago I was "an out and out flirt," and afterwards had put faith in me, only to be deceived.

Well, he could read me now, with those new spectacles of his, to the very core of my heart. No danger of my "leading him through a wilderness of hopes and fears" any more! Not that I would have done it. I only wanted his cordial friendship, and that I should never have again.

"O Vic, dear, what does make you look so?" said Van, taking me in her lap, mother-fashion, as soon as we were alone together.

"Oh, well, I don't quite know, Van," said I, sobbing convulsively. "Only it seems as if life is going to be one long struggle up a hill that never slopes, and the top will always be farther off and bleaker the higher up I get. There! that's as well as I can describe it."

"You dear little soul!" said she. "The Lord won't let you feel like this all your life, if you try to be His child and do right."

"Well, I suppose He can't make my life what it would have been if I had n't spoiled it," said I, grimly. "I suppose He can't help my living it all alone. All alone! Just think, Van!"

"Why, Vic, you'll have me."

"No, darling, I shan't. You'll love some one else better than old Vic. That's the last drop my cup will hold, and I know it's coming."

"Look at me," said Van, raising my head and gazing at me with her honest, unswerving gray eyes. "Would I ever leave you for any human being?"

"No, Van, no, — unless some one should ask you, who loved you even better than I. But that's so likely to happen. Did n't you ever think it might be?"

"No, Vic, I never — did," replied Van; but a blush

rose instantly and mantled her whole face. Van's thoughts move slowly, but her blushes are as quick as flashes,—the brightest, shyest things. She went right on talking, with her hand over my mouth, as if she were afraid I should say more.

"No, Vic, I give you my word of honor I'll never desert you. Whither thou goest I will go. Thy people shall be my people."

"You darling sister!" cried I, freeing my lips, "I shan't let you promise any such thing. You've devoted yourself to me from the day we were born, and it's 'no fair.'"

"Hush! I want to say it, and hold to it," said Van, slowly and deliberately, pressing her two hands together as she spoke. I knew she meant it, and was determined to mean it forever, come what might.

Like a selfish girl I was comforted, and did not ask myself why. As the French would say, "all that there is of most beautiful" in the way of sisterly love was in Van's heart for me, and I thought, with her to help me climb the hill, I might plod on pretty comfortably. Perhaps, indeed, this was the very way we had been fore-ordained to go. Had n't Van said so a hundred times?

So I bathed my eyes, and we went down to supper with our arms about each other's waists.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VAN'S STORY.

SHE DARES NOT LISTEN.

THERE was so much freshness in Vic's nature, she had such sound health and high spirits, that she soon rebounded from this terrible depression.

"I could make a moan or two, lamenting over lost days," said she, beginning to study with zeal, "but I won't; it's a waste of time."

I admired her for her energy and courage. Here had I been plodding along with slow and even steps, while she had dropped far behind; but now she would not be long in overtaking me, it seemed. Everything else was easier "to make up" than music; but she immediately doubled her practising-hours.

"Don't say a word, Van; it won't hurt me half so much to work hard as it would to sit down and cry for spilled milk."

I think she was right. If I had been in her place I should have had a long debate in my own mind whether to resume our Thursday evening suppers at the Du Souchets'; but Vic decided it in a twinkling.

"I'll go and brave it out," said she, with a quivering lip. "I won't shirk one bit of my discipline."

I was glad of this, for we had already stayed away

a month under one pretext or another, and Dr. Zelig and Aunt Filura were complaining bitterly. I should have been very sorry to give up those social evenings, which were the brightest spots to me of our whole life at Paris.

"Let's start a little earlier than usual," said I, "and call on Uncle Paoli."

He had been suffering from a bad cold ever since our trip to Fontainebleau. Remembering that he loved flowers, I ventured to buy a damask rose, which I wrapped from the chill winter air in several thicknesses of paper.

"I hope he won't scorn it as he did the tamarinds the other day," said I.

His apartments were in a minor hotel in Auteuil, and as we walked along slowly, chatting by the way, we were overtaken by Clum and Aunt Filura. Clum had a small pitcher of arrowroot in his right hand, while his left was hidden in his vest, which served him now as a sling.

"I feel a good deal concerned about Mr. Doggerty," said dear Aunt Filura. "His rheumatism has grown upon him astonishingly this fall. Did you ever think, C'lumbus, that he may be feeling the effects of his hair-dye?"

"I can't say I ever did, Aunt Filly."

"Well, he has dyed his hair for twenty years or more, and you know sugar of lead and such things are rank poisons to some constitutions."

"Aunt Filly, why in the world did n't you study medicine? You're a natural pathologist," said Clum, smiling at her through his spectacles. "But suppose I

run on ahead and prepare Mr. Daugherty for his surprise party?"

These "floors" in Paris look so much alike, with light moquette carpets, scarlet coverings on the furniture, red curtains, and white and gilt wood-work, that you would hardly have known Uncle Paoli's floor from any of the others, if it had not been for the little tin tea-kettle and glazed tea-pot, which always sat side by side on his stove. This time he was steeping sage, and the odor filled the room.

"Don't rise, Mr. Doggerty, don't rise," said Aunt Filura, distressed by his haggard appearance.

He was lying on the sofa, with his boot-soles aloft, but scrambled up, and offered us chairs with much ceremony, though he did not seem very glad to see us, and was so cool towards me especially that I dared not present the rose.

"I don't know how you all happened to think of calling. It was very kind of you; but if I'd been dressed up, and looked respectable, you would n't have come nigh me, I'll venter to say."

He did look rather barbaric. His hair was rough, and probably had not been dyed very lately, for like a sable cloud it had a silver lining. As he was usually very nice, these signs of neglect showed that he must be feeling poorly.

"Ain't you a little conscience-smitten, Vandeely, to think you haven't been more neighborly?" wheezed he. "I might be sick and die here all alone, and you'd never hear of it."

"O, Uncle Paoli!" I began.

"I've got an outrageous cold, Vandeely, and you

knew it, for you was here only day before yesterday."

This speech, following unintentionally so close upon his reproof to me, set us all laughing, and Uncle Paoli had the grace to smile faintly. He could appreciate a joke as well as any one, though he was not always in the humor.

"I got cold a Saturday, traipsing off into that piece of woods with the rest of you," added he, puffing for breath, "and I had n't any business going to meeting a Sunday, but I went. I might just as well have stayed at home and read my Bible, though, for Mr. Brimblecome has lost two of his front teeth lately, and I can't make out half he says."

"Likely your cold affects your hearing some," Aunt Filura ventured to remark.

"Oh, no; I can hear pretty near as well as ever I could, if folks only speak plain. But I'm out of conceit of Mr. Brimblecome, — getting up and reading his poor little composition, so nobody can understand it! It's a perfect swindle."

Evidently Uncle Paoli was in a very bad humor. He did n't see how anybody could help getting cold in such raw weather as this.

"If you've paid any attention to the seasons, Filury, you must have noticed that we have amazing cold winters everywhere, and have had ever since the eclipse of '69."

"Oh, I don't believe that eclipse can affect the weather now," returned she, setting Uncle Paoli's little soapstone under the tea-pot to stop the profuse boiling of the sage.

"You don't believe it? Well, I've seen folks that would n't own the moon had any influence on the growth of vegetables," puffed Uncle Paoli. "But I must say, Filury, I did n't take you for one of those kind. Why, you've heard tell of the great eclipse of 1806?"

"Oh yes; father used to talk about it frequently."

"Well, the New England States did n't get thawed out after that for twenty years, Filury, — not for twenty years. And now you want to make it appear that eclipses have n't any effect upon the weather!"

Aunt Filura had the discretion to make no reply. Clum had been looking at Uncle Paoli with professional gravity for some time, and now came forward to feel his pulse. He was very modest; but he was beginning in a small way to practise now and then with his uncle. Henriette said the most he did was to polish instruments, and hold ether sponges to patients' noses. Perhaps that was partly true; but Clum had too much common-sense to despise the day of small things. Whatever the first steps were, he would take them perseveringly and make no parade about it.

"Oh! I know what ails me," said Uncle Paoli, drawing away his hand; "it's the *bronichal* tubes; but I never was pestered before with such a shortness of breath. I wonder whether or no there ain't some enlargement of the heart."

"Would you like to have me examine and see?" asked Clum, rather timidly. "Hullo! There's Uncle 'Zeke going by. I'll hail him."

"Don't you do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mr. Daugherty, nervously; but he spoke too late. Clum, being very quick-motioned, had already done the deed.

"Well, if you will you will, and I don't see how I can help myself," said the sick man, evidently well pleased, as Dr. Zelie's ear was laid close to his chest, "but I did n't send for you: I suppose you understand that?"

"Perfectly."

Clum gave me a sly look, and I interpreted it that Uncle Paoli was trying to guard against future doctor's bills. The examination was very searching.

"Well, you seem to find mischief, Doctor. Now tell me, without flattery, is there anything to pay with my heart?"

"No, the heart merely suffers through sympathy."

"Sympathy? I can't believe that, it's so contrary to his nature," whispered Vic.

Clum wheeled about, and smiled behind Mr. Daugherty's back.

"Well, if it ain't my heart, what then? Out with it, and don't put any new-fangled names to it."

"Silent pleurisy," replied Dr. Zelie, with a face that told nothing more.

"Well, that's new-fangled enough,—first I ever heard of it; but then pleurisy ain't considered a dangerous complaint as I know of."

"Not generally."

"Oh, well, I did n't expect you'd think I was much sick; but I guess I know how pressed I am for breath, and all the talk in the world won't convince me I ain't a suffering creeter."

"On the contrary, I am convinced that you do suffer extremely, but with your permission I hope to relieve you a little."

"Water on the chest," explained Aunt Filura to us girls in an under-tone. "Mr. Doggerty," said she, drawing near the poor old man for the first time, — she was very shy of him lately, — "had n't you better move away from that window? The casing don't fit snug, and you may add to your cold."

"Never saw a French winder that did fit snug," assented Uncle Paoli, shoving his chair across the carpet. "Seems as if any joiner with common-sense might know better than to set 'em on hinges."

"Would n't you like this rose, sir?" said I, putting it in his hand.

Instantly the frown smoothed away from his forehead; he raised the rose to his hot lips and kissed it. What chord did it touch in his poor old heart? Did you ever think that the odor of a rose, more than that of most flowers, recalls sweet memories? How can an object just born carry in its bosom a suggestion of scenes that passed away years and years ago? Yet it surely does, and that is why we love the rose.

"Come here and kiss me, Vandeely," said Uncle Paoli, in a changed tone. "You do have some feeling for old folks after all."

"Girls, we will go now," said Aunt Filura, obeying a look from "'Zekiel"; and we went away, leaving the two doctors with Uncle Paoli.

We asked Dr. Zelig at tea-time if there was anything alarming in the case.

"Not immediately," he replied.

"Why are you looking so serious?" said he, coming up to me after we had all adjourned to the parlor, and I was sitting in my corner holding Agrippa.

"Oh, I was thinking of Uncle Paoli sick here among strangers."

"Well, would he be any better off in America?"

"That's the very forlornness of it, Dr. Zelig. I really don't suppose he would. He has 'no near kin,' he says, but his sister Soffy and his nephew Lucius. I've often wanted to tell him *we* would all love him if he would only let us; but you know he insists upon it that we don't and can't"

"That's true; and he really causes us to feel an aversion, merely by foreboding it so much. It's dangerous to be too sensitive and exacting, Evangeline; it reminds people to dislike us when otherwise they wouldn't have thought of it."

"I know it. And here's Uncle Paoli as rich as need be, but feeling too poor to call in a physician; is n't it pitiful?"

"Yes, especially when you consider that his nephew is spending money like water."

"Dr. Zelig, I don't know why it is, but I've noticed that you always curl your lip when you speak of Lucius Ulmer. I've really fancied there might have been some trouble between him and Clum."

"There was, a serious one; and if my boy was n't a gentleman he never would speak to the contemptible fellow. It has been a surprising thing to see the coolness with which Mr. Ulmer has visited at this house, considering all the circumstances."

"Nothing that he does will ever surprise me, Dr. Zelig, since the way he acted at Heidelberg. Indeed, I'm almost afraid sometimes that Vic is n't free from him yet."

Dr. Zelig's next remark was quite wide of the subject.

"Agrippa," said he, leaning forward and stroking the kitten, "is it pleasant to see Evangeline back in her corner or not? If it is, you may purr."

Whereupon Agrippa purred loudly.

"Why, 'Zekiel," said Aunt Filura, roused from her book by our laughing, "I don't know when I've seen you sit down so long in the parlor before. It seems like old times, and I can't help hoping but what we shall have as social evenings as we had last winter."

"Suppose we have a Shakespeare Club?" suggested Dr. Zelig. "How would you like it, Evangeline?"

"Oh, capital!"

But I thought to myself for that we should need Clum; and were we likely to have him? He had gone away to-night directly after supper, and the three girls were managing a quartette with the aid of Etienne.

"Hark! there's somebody in the hall," said Dr. Zelig. "I don't believe you want to be bored by company, Evangeline, any more than I do. Come into the library with me, and I'll show you some new illustrations of Shakespeare."

The library had had no fire in it, but was tolerably heated from the parlor, as the door had been standing open all day. I was glad enough we had escaped when I heard the voices of the visitors, — M. Lenoir and Mr. Theobald. I pitied Vic, but her pride would take her through anything.

"Well, you've brought the kitten," said Dr. Zelig, smiling, as he lighted the Roman lamp and reached down some elegant new volumes of Shakespeare.

The engravings were fine, I am sure ; but after the first one we forgot to turn the leaves, for we fell to talking and listening to the music that surged in through the open door.

"Mr. Theobold and Henriette sing well together," said Dr. Zelig.

"I was thinking of that."

"Has it occurred to you lately that Mr. Theobold is having rather a more comfortable winter than might have been anticipated?"

"I hope he is."

"Such wounds as his don't amount to much, you see, Evangeline. You've heard, haven't you, that love is nothing but a figment of the brain?"

I stooped to pick up a thread which was lying on the floor in the form of a "Z."

"I asked you a question, Evangeline."

"Did you? I thought you were merely expressing an opinion."

"Oh, no ; I wanted *your* opinion."

"A figment of the brain!" repeated I, thinking how dreadful it was for a young man to be so cynical. "Why, you might call the mistakes figments ; but you would n't say it of the real thing, Dr. Zelig?"

"But how much better is the real thing? Is n't a man more or less under a glamour the moment he allows himself to fall in love? You know it involves his regarding one woman as the dearest and best in the world. Is n't that a delusion to begin with, Evangeline?"

"I don't think so, Dr. Zelig. The dearest and best for *him* is all he means."

"Oh! that's the way you explain it. Well, that has a more sensible sound really," said Dr. Zélie, with a peculiar smile, which made me ashamed of the warmth into which I had been betrayed. Should I never learn to distinguish between his sense and his nonsense?

"So you think there is method in this sort of madness after all, Evangeline, and it amounts on the whole to pretty good reason? That was what I wanted to find out."

"I suppose I think very much as other people do," said I, a little embarrassed by this cross-questioning. He was always trying to draw me out, as if he really cared for my opinions, — a very subtle flattery for a young girl like me, who was not supposed by people in general to have any opinions worth considering; but to-night he seemed to be holding me under mental thumb-screws. What was coming next?

"There's a bit of news in yesterday's paper I'd like to show you," said he, taking a copy of the "*Figaro*" from his desk, and putting it in my hands.

The item he indicated was the marriage of Alphonse Lambert and Françoise, only daughter of the late Dr. Morazain.

"Then that's over," said I, as he stood watching me with his arms folded

"Yes, over. So far as I'm concerned, you see, *Félicité* is 'dust and ashes, dead and done with,'" said Dr. Zélie, taking the paper from my hands, and laying it back on his desk with an air of dismissing the subject forever.

"Do you want to go back to the parlor?"

"No."

"I'm glad to keep you a while, for I want to talk a little more; but I'm afraid you're not quite warm," said Dr. Zelig; and not waiting for a reply he went into the entry and returned with a shawl, which he pinned carefully about my shoulders.

"There, is n't that better?"

"Thank you; and you've happened to bring my own shawl."

"Happened? Don't you suppose I know intuitively what belongs to you?"

"Vic's shawl and mine are exactly alike."

"Yes; but you fasten yours with two black pins linked together, and she fastens hers with a silver arrow."

"How observing you are!"

"That does n't follow. I could n't tell, to save my life, what sort of shawl-pin Henriette wears."

"That's odd."

"Is it? For my part, I regard pins as trivial things, Evangeline. I don't believe I should take the slightest interest in this one," said he, touching it as he leaned over me, "if it belonged to any other person on earth."

"Oh!" said I, at a loss for words. And then to fill the long pause, I added "Ah!"

This was not brilliant; but his last remark had not been very brilliant either.

"Evangeline!"

"Well, sir!"

"I wish you would look up and let me see if you took in the force of what I said."

I turned my head slowly, and tried to meet his eyes with a smile.

"I believe it was shawl-pius, sir."

But he had forgotten all about that, and was in no mood for trifling. As I looked at his face a mask seemed to fall from it and reveal something very beautiful, — I scarcely knew what, but something I had not dreamed was there before. I dropped my eyes suddenly, trembling all over.

"Evangeline," said he, taking my hand and bending towards me, "the idea must have occurred to you —"

"O Dr. Zelig, don't, don't!" I stammered forth, remembering Vic in that moment, and my promise to her. What was this new and wonderful happiness which was trying to thrust itself between us twin-sisters? I would have none of it! I rose, determined to shut it out with bolt and bar.

"My precious girl, did I frighten you? I don't expect you to understand my feeling for you; I only —"

"Please don't say another word, Dr. Zelig; I can't bear it," said I, motioning him away with both hands.

My vehemence surprised him; he was not prepared for it. I could see the color go out of his cheeks and the light out of his eyes. It moved me so I dared not look again, dared not have him speak to me.

"Oh, won't you go away and leave me?" I entreated. "Please go away."

"Do you really mean it, Evangeline?" said he, his voice trembling.

I nodded without raising my eyes. In another moment I was alone. How long I sat in the library I don't know, or what I thought, for my brain was in a whirl. After a while Etienne put in his head to see if I was there, and Vic came and asked if I had been asleep.

Then, as Clum did not return, Dr. Zelig escorted us home. Vic talked all the way. How thankful I was for that brisk tongue of hers!

But when we reached Madame Rey's, and she danced in at the door, a little in advance of me, Dr. Zelig drew me back a moment, saying, "I must ask one question, Evangeline. — just one. When you rebuffed me so this evening, was it because of any sudden repulsion, any feeling of — of — dislike?"

"No, no, no!" cried I, crushing his hand, and then thrusting it away from me and running after Vic.

I was glad and thankful I had been allowed to say that one thing, and not have Dr. Zelig suffer from a wrong impression; but as for consequences, or whether there would be any consequences, I never stopped to think.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VIC'S STORY.

"NEGATIVES PRESERVED."

I VIC, knew nothing of this, mind you; only it did strike me at times that Van seemed a little absent-minded.

"Where are you going?" said I, one day, as she stood dreamily before the glass, fastening on her hat with two hair-pins.

"Oh, did n't I tell you? Why, to see Uncle Paoli. And, Vic, he complained yesterday that you neglect him. I forgot to tell you."

"Did he? When I called the day before he was 'out of conceit' with me, I had so little gumption about sickness."

"And he says, 'Vandeely here has n't much of any,'" quoted Van, laughing; "'she's no great of a nurse.' Still, if I stay away from him, he's hurt."

"Well, and he's hurt with me either way, whether I go or don't go."

But I got down my cloak. The chances were that he'd be less injured if I went, and I was honestly trying, in these latter days, to walk in the way of my duty. You'll see where it led me,—straight into a hornets' nest.

Talk of warnings! Why could n't I have had one as

we stood so unsuspectingly at Uncle Paoli's threshold, awaiting his gruff "Entrez"? For who should open the door in answer to our knock, — who, of all persons in *la belle France*, but Lucius Ulmer!

Oh, how I longed then for the Danish boy's whistle that takes you where you want to go! I doubt though whether I should have had breath enough to blow it. Van said afterwards that Mr. Ulmer himself looked confused. I'm sure I don't know. The moment I caught the glimmer of his sandy beard I dropped my eyes. I remember shaking something, — it may have been his hand, — and then running by him to Uncle Paoli's easy-chair and hitting the rocker.

"Why will you smash so, Lucius?" said he fretfully, roused from a nap. "Oh, its Victory, is it? Why, what set you out to come?"

"How are you to-day, Uncle Paoli?"

"Miserable; I've been terrible miserable for a week back, but you have n't been a-nigh me to inquire."

"Oh, yes, day before yesterday; don't you remember?"

"You might as well out with the truth," said he, wilfully deaf. "You don't care a sixpence for me, I ain't gay and lively enough for you; but let me have young company and you're willing enough to call."

I'll be just to Uncle Paoli, and say I'm sure he had n't the faintest idea of twitting me to my face of thrusting myself upon his nephew's attentions; yet for all that, I could n't help blushing like a sumach in October.

"Well, well, sit down," he went on, with tardy hospitality. "I'm glad to see you, and you too, little Van-

deely. I've no right to complain of you, when kin so much nearer use me so, leaving me walled up here before I'm dead, and cantering off round the country for no earthly object but to spend money."

"I was n't aware of your condition, Uncle, you forget that," said Mr. Ulmer, laboriously respectful, though his face flamed. "The moment I got word of your illness I came. If you wanted me before you had only to write."

"Only to write! Maybe you'll find out for yourself some time that an *invaleed* don't feel like writing. But you might have mistrusted I was coming down when you were here last, Lucius. It was unforeseen of you going off as you did. After you said, too, the first day you came, that you should stay in Paris a spell."

Mr. Ulmer looked painfully embarrassed, and I sat on thorns, knowing very well I had been the means of his leaving the city. Of course he had given up all thoughts of me long ago, but it was too bad for him to be reminded in this way that I had rejected him. Certainly I ought to make him feel as comfortable as I could, it was my bounden duty; so with a mighty effort I broke the pause by addressing to him some edifying remarks about the weather. In the midst of them Clum walked in. He called twice a day to feel Uncle Paoli's pulse, measure out his powders, and carry a report to Dr. Zelig, who had the general oversight.

I presumed Mr. Ulmer and Clum had met in the morning, for they didn't shake hands, but just exchanged the coolest of bows. Evidently they were no nearer liking each other than they had been, but I was as far as ever from understanding the cause of the trouble.

Then Clum came over to me, greeting me with the most ceremonious politeness, but reserving his smiles for my more deserving sister on the cushion at Uncle Paoli's feet.

"Good afternoon, Columbus," said Mr. Daugherty, reproachfully. "Your uncle could n't come, I s'pose? I wanted to see him about my circulations. I've no feeling in my fingers. Why, I've no more control over 'em than you have."

Clum listened patiently to a chapter of ailments, at the close drawing out a stethoscope, for the purpose of sounding the patient's lungs; but Mr. Daugherty would not have it.

"Your uncle'll attend to that, boy," said he, waving away the instrument peremptorily. "Don't pester me. I'm as hoarse now as a fife-major, talking so much."

"Very well, do as you like about it," said Clum, rising, with a look of chagrin. "I must be off. I'll send Uncle 'Zeke round in the morning."

"So do," cried Uncle Paoli, with unflattering energy; adding, before Clum was half-way-down stairs, that he "did n't want a young doctor 'tinkering over him.'"

"And now, Vandeely," said he in a wheedling tone, stroking her curls with his poor trembling old fingers, "would n't you just as lief try your luck at my head? It aches masterly. Lucius, drop that curtain, will you, and wheel up the lounge? I'll camp down, and if so be the pain goes off I may catch a nap, — if it's still, that is. You and Victory better step into the other room."

Van looked ready to sink, for the dear child has a heart, and she saw what an awkward arrangement that

was for Mr. Ulmer and myself; but there was no help for it: Uncle Paoli was feeble and suffering, and his whims must be gratified.

"Put that little machine on the shelf, Lucius, before you go," continued he from the lounge, pointing to the stethoscope Clum had forgotten. "It'll get knocked off the table. There, now throw the shawl over me; that'll do."

Mr. Ulmer held the door open for me, and I passed into the reception-room in advance of him, frightened out of my seven senses. I think I pitied him more than I did myself, till, glancing at him as we both sat down, it struck me that he did n't look as uncomfortable as the circumstances warranted; you might almost have fancied he was enjoying the occasion.

"Well, I envy you your self-possession," thought I, pulling threads of silk from the fringe of my dress, while he discoursed volubly about Morris Lynde's studio, at Rome, which had been his daily resort; about Uncle Paoli's illness, and his own interrupted visit at Rome. But presently he paused deliberately.

"It is hard to be ill," said I.

Of all the hundred thousand words in the English language, positively those six were the only ones I could lay hold of.

Mr. Ulmer let the poor little sentence go. "I met Mr. Theobald last night, Victoria. I had some conversation with him, and he told me something I was surprised to hear."

"Ah?"

"Yes; he said I was laboring under a delusion: he was not engaged to you."

"Well, did anybody ever say he was?"

For pity's sake, what next?

"No; but I should be a dolt, Victoria, not to suspect there had been a flirtation between you. How else could I account for your fickleness towards me? I went to Heidelberg, and you refused to see me, — me, your acknowledged lover! I afterwards learned you were receiving daily visits from Mr. Theobold at that very time. Later, I followed you to Paris; Mr. Theobold had preceded me. You treated me as coldly as before. Naturally I inferred you had transferred your affections to him; but on being summoned here by Uncle Paoli, I find the bubble burst. Everything is over between you and Mr. Theobold."

"We never were engaged, but I'll own I flirted with him shamefully. O Mr. Ulmer, I've been a reckless, cruel girl! I'm ashamed to look either of you in the face."

Mr. Ulmer paced the floor excitedly.

"Then it was but a passing fancy, Victoria; one you've outlived, one —"

"Oh, don't talk about it, — don't talk about me, any way! it is n't worth while," said I, starting up in alarm. "By the way, speaking of Mr. Theobold, he's quite attentive to Henriette Du Souchet; she is a bewitching girl, — don't you think so? — and extremely pretty; and she's getting to be very fond of Aunt Filura. I'm so glad, for Miss Wix is such a noble woman, is n't she?"

"Your conduct has disturbed me greatly, I won't deny that," continued Mr. Ulmer, relentlessly, exactly as if I had not spoken; "but I can be magnanimous.

I am ready and willing to forgive this vagary of yours, and renew our engagement, Victoria."

"Nobody asked you to, sir, she said," was on my lips; but how could I be saucy while he stood there beaming down on me like disinterested benevolence personified? Really, it was getting too absurd.

"Did you understand me, Victoria?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Ulmer: it's you that won't understand. I thought that was all settled long ago, — once in Germany and once in France. I thought I'd made it plain that we never could be anything nearer than friends. Mr. Theobald had nothing whatever to do with the case any more than your Uncle Paoli."

"He had not? Then who, in the name of reason, has come between us?" said he, angrily.

"No one, oh, no one, Mr. Ulmer! it's only that —"

"Somebody has been setting you against me, then. Ah! you can't deny it. It is Columbus Du Souchet! What has that wretch been telling you of me, Victoria? Answer me, I —"

But here Clum walked right in.

"I left my stethoscope —" he began, but stopped confused as he saw our excited faces.

Mr. Ulmer turned upon him with blazing eyes. "What do you mean, sir, by prejudicing this girl against me? What has she to do with our private quarrels? You're a base, contemptible puppy, sir!"

"Lucius Ulmer! This from you?" exclaimed Clum, pale with anger.

"Yes, sir, and I'll repeat it, sir. You're a low-lived, sneaking cur to step in between me and this young girl, and poison her ears by whining about my —"

"Take care, fellow!" retorted Clum, with fierce irony. "If her ears are poisoned 't will be by yourself, and I advise you to collect your senses before you let out that story! I've never soiled my lips with it, and I never want to."

"I—I—misapprehended—" said Mr. Ulmer, suddenly cringing.

"Though I can't say," added Clum, coming over and standing beside me with a protecting air, which I blessed him for in my heart,—"I can't say, if I had had warning of your intentions towards this young lady, I might n't have told her certain facts I should have wished a sister of mine told in such a case; but I had n't the most distant idea of your aspiring to Victoria Asbury!"

Anybody but Mr. Ulmer would have stopped then or ordered "coffee and pistols for two"; but he began again just where he had left off before his attack on Clum.

"But, you see, Victoria's conduct is perfectly incomprehensible. Here we had been engaged for months, and meanwhile she had written me scores of affectionate letters!"

"Oh, don't!" sobbed I, completely overwhelmed.

"Never mind him, Vic," said Clum, patting my head paternally.

"Which I've got and can show you, sir," resumed the perennial torment. "Well, and what does she do all at once but protest she does n't care enough for me, which is—"

"Then, for Jove's sake, why don't you let her alone?" cried Clum, with a movement as if he were about to



**"THEN, FOR JOVE'S SAKE, WHY DON'T YOU LET HER ALONE."
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double his fists. "If a girl says fairly and squarely she doesn't care for a man, the only decent thing he can do is to walk off."

"But I know better. There's some other reason for her freak. Why, I'll answer for her affection!"

Would he? Well, so would I, if I died for it. I had n't meant to humiliate him any more than necessary before Clum, but I could n't stand this a minute longer.

"I'm not fond of you, Mr. Ulmer, and never was," cried I, desperately, "and you've no right to say it, when I have to pray hard not to hate you!"

Mr. Ulmer gazed at me for once in speechless amazement.

"There, you have her word for it, and I'm here to witness it," said Clum, gently reseating me; for I had risen, and was trembling violently. "And now, Ulmer, if you have a spark of manliness in you, you'll stop tormenting this poor girl."

Mr. Ulmer turned his back on him. "I don't know what Du Souchet's motives are for taking such an active part in this affair; I scorn his interference. But listen, Victoria Asbury! You have now said words to me which I never can forgive—*never!*" repeated he, in a lofty rage. "You will learn to your cost that Lucius Ulmer cannot bear insult added to injury! From this moment you will consider me released from any further obligation to you. I never could marry a girl who would demean herself to say before a third person she had to pray not to hate me!"

Thereupon he bowed to me, as an elm-tree might bow to a miserable little toad beneath it, and walked out of the house.

"I congratulate you, Vic, on being finally rid of that intolerable prig," said Clum, with a warm-hearted shake of the hand, as the door closed. "He has put his own seal to the quitclaim deed, and now he can't trouble you again."

"But what should I have done without you to help me? It was saintly good in you to take my part," said I gratefully, rejoicing most of all that Clum was my friend again.

"Oh, that's nothing; I always sympathize with the victimized," returned he, freezing immediately.

Alas! I could n't help seeing he did n't approve of me any more than before; he had stood up for me out of pure chivalry, just as he would have done for Julie Papeneau, if she had been alive and needed it.

"What was all the noise about?" asked Van, coming out of Uncle Paoli's room after soothing him to sleep.

"Mr. Ulmer won't have me, Van," replied I. "He says it's no use, he will not; he's sorry for me, but I must give him up!"

"Of course," said Van, indignantly, "we might have known Lucius Ulmer would n't let you be the one to break the engagement! But now he has broken it himself, and I hope he'll have sense enough to keep the negative."

"Amen!" said Clum, walking off with the staff and scope.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VAN'S STORY.

"JUST FRIENDS."

WELL, Mr. Ulmer having rejected Vic of his own free act and deed, there was no further trouble. He stayed on at Paris for his uncle's sake, but it was no longer necessary to avoid him; he avoided us with what was meant to be the most cutting coldness. I dare say he thought he was breaking Vic's heart.

Mr. Daugherty was suffering at times extremely, but would not hear of a hired nurse; "he couldn't be pestered by strangers," he said. He made no allusion to the expense, though we suspected that was his chief objection.

He was so low-spirited, and in such need of home-comforts, that Aunt Filura proposed removing him to the Du Souchets', where we could all take care of him by turns.

When we told him her plan, his eyes lightened like the eyes of Jonathan after he tasted the honey in the wood; but he raised a thousand objections, and needed much urging before he would go.

Once there, he snuggled himself into the orange-flower-scented bed in the best chamber as if he accepted

it as a means of discipline ; but Aunt Filura knew his ways, and only smiled.

"When I compare him with her, he seems like a Christian-in-law," said I to Dr. Zelig.

"That's an expressive word," said he ; "but, Evangeline, the man is more religious at heart than we think, perhaps, and more grateful. I had a talk with him to-day that gave me a glimpse at another side of his character, and it surprised me."

Vic was always shy of sick people, but would have waited dutifully on Uncle Paoli if he had not repulsed her with disdain. Ever since the final rupture with Mr. Ulmer, he had really disliked her ; so a double duty fell on me.

"So be it," said Vic. "I don't believe men, the best of them, are very charming when they are sick. They can't wear bright pretty wrappers, with soft lace round the neck ; but they ought to, to hide that disagreeable Adam's apple, that Adam swallowed whole, after Eve had taken one bite."

I confess, with tears in my eyes, that Uncle Paoli was n't attractive to me, and it was just for sweet humanity's sake that I spent so much time with him. He scolded me continually, though he liked me better than anybody else but Dr. Zelig. I could "ease off his head," and had n't such a way of "smashing round" as Filury had. He had always considered Filury "as good a woman as he about ever saw" ; but after her refusal of him he found plenty of fault with her.

In going to the Du Souchets' so much, I saw a great deal of Dr. Zelig, though I did try to keep out of his way. I made my longest visit to Uncle Paoli while

Vic was practising, for the doctor had his office-hours then; but he seemed to have changed his time, for I invariably met him.

At first I was shy, especially if he entered the room when I was alone with Mr. Daugherty; but as he never made the slightest allusion to that strange conversation in the library, I began to breathe more freely. Still, it couldn't have passed out of his mind; for if I ventured to look up, I was sure to meet his eye with a question in it, as if he were studying me.

"He knows more of what goes on in my mind than I do," thought I, shrinking into myself.

I made a mental memorandum every morning, like a person I read of once,—"Remember to forget Dr. Zelig"; but it did no good. There was always something occurring that kept me thinking of him.

One afternoon, just as he was going away, Uncle Paoli called him back and detained him with some unreasonable questions, which he answered very gently.

"How patient Dr. Zelig is," said I to Aunt Filura, in an under-tone. Patience was not his ruling virtue by any means.

Happening to look up next moment, I knew he had overheard my remark. I saw it in the sudden glow that rose to his face as our eyes met, and the smile he gave me with his "Good-by, Evangeline."

"There, 'Zekiel has gone off happy because he heard you say that about him. He does think a sight of what you say," observed Aunt Filura, innocently.

Was that true? Did he value those little words just because I had spoken them? It was wonderful indeed.

"It is not by reason of any superiority in me that he cares so much," thought I. "If he really loves me, which does seem incredible, it is not that I am good or wise or beautiful; it is simply because we two are kindred. I always did believe in the relationship of souls. But ah! there's Vic! and there's my sacred promise."

"Well, Vandeely, if you've set there long enough in a brown study, I'll be obleeged to you to come and make passes over my head, so I can catch a nap. I suppose you know Lucius will be along soon, and it's high time you were at it," said Uncle Paoli, in tones of stinging rebuke.

"Aunt Filura," said I, as I stood over the patient, and she dusted the room, "do you know this is a strange, helter-skelter world, and things are always going wrong?"

"It's likely I discovered that before ever you were born, Vandelia; and the queer part of it is, you'll find it'll keep growing stranger and stranger the longer you live."

"Will it, though? Why, I thought I should be used to it in time."

"Well, so you will, to some things; but new ones are always coming up. I suppose that's what makes life so interesting," reasoned Aunt Filura, putting another stick of wood in the stove, obedient to Uncle Paoli's sharp demand.

"But is life always interesting?" said I, looking at the good woman's face, which bore token of her having come off victor in more than one secret battle. "I can imagine it might become rather tedious sometimes,

auntie, in case we always do our duty, and let it cut straight across our inclinations."

"I don't know as the Lord anywhere promises we shall always be happy," said Aunt Filura, dusting the bedstead earnestly; "and it seems to me the sooner we get rid of the idea we came into this world to have a good time, the better 't will be for us."

Uncle Paoli was in a sweet sleep by this time, his hand clasping my forefinger.

"O Aunt Filura," said, I turning round to her, "if there's anybody on this footstool I believe in, it's you! If there's anybody beside my blessed mother that I want to imitate, it's you!"

"You don't mean it, you don't really care about me, Vandelia?" said Aunt Filura; touching my shoulder with a bewildered look.

"You dear woman! how can I help loving you?" said I, kissing her.

Tears sprang to her eyes, and she put her arm round me, then withdrew it hastily.

"I'm glad you said it; it was real kind of you, when I've never done the least thing for you, Vandelia. If you were my niece now, and I had come to France for your sake —"

Her voice choked then, as if all the past pain she had suffered from the Du Souchet children's ingratitude had settled in her throat. She did not mean to give the faintest hint of blame, but I understood her better than she knew.

"Never done anything^o for me! Why, auntie, you're always doing! You've been the greatest comfort to Vic and me, off here, away from our mother, and I

want you to know it. It does seem strange you shouldn't have the least idea how good you are!"

A look of incredulity, mingled with joyful surprise, lighted up her dear old face at that.

"Why, Vandelia, I can't make out what you mean by talking so to me! If I was Polly, now, it would be altogether different, for she had a winning way with her that young folks always liked; but I ain't one of the agreeable kind," said she, a pathetic smile trembling round her lips; "I can't show my feelings, and I've got in the way of not expecting folks to think I've got any."

"Ah! but you can't cheat us so, auntie; we know better than that."

She looked gratified, and went so far as to let her hand rest on my shoulder.

"Well, the truth is, Vandelia, I do think everything of my friends; I'm conscious of thinking more of 'em than what they do of me, and I try to be satisfied to have it so; for ain't it more blessed to give than to receive? That holds good in love as in everything else."

How luminous her face was then!

"But if you do feel the least drawing towards me, I'm proper glad to know it, for you're a great favorite of mine, and this is the happiest day I've seen since I've been in Paris."

Then Henriette came in, and Aunt Filura slipped out, leaving me with a stronger impression than usual of her solitary grandeur. If I were left without home or kindred, could I ever be like her,—a strong tree, standing alone on a hill-top, taking wind and storm as they come, and trying not to look wistfully at the forest,

where other trees live side by side and grow old together? Never, never! I could not understand the secret of this loving woman's strength.

"Uncle Zeke," said Clum the very next day, as if he knew my unspoken thoughts, "it's queer, is n't it, about the growth of trees? Plant one alone, and it won't grow more than half as high as a grove of trees set out at the same time, but it will strike a much deeper root."

"Yes," said Dr. Zelig, "and its strength of fibre is enormous."

"There it is!" said I to myself. "Aunt Filura's grandeur and strength are owing in part to her position; and after all it seems God may have had a design in planting her alone."

Our Thursday evenings went on as usual, and Clum condescended to stay at home, though his manner to Vic remained coolly formal.

"The obstinate fellow!" remarked Dr. Zelig to me on one of these occasions, when Clum and Vic were singing a duet without looking at each other; "but he is young yet and has n't discovered that he is fallible himself as well as Vic. We have to find out our own weakness, you know, Evangeline, before we can have charity for poor human nature."

Yes, I really believe that is true. In the midst of the singing Dr. Zelig left the parlor very quietly, but I should almost have known it with my eyes shut, for the room never seemed the same when he was not in it. "He has gone up-stairs to his study, and maybe won't be back for the evening," I thought; and a quick thrill of dismay shot through and through me as I asked my-

self: "When I go home and don't see him at all, what will become of me then?"

It was perfectly easy to be true to Vic as long as I was right here in Paris, where I could see Dr. Zelig every day and exchange thoughts with him; indeed, I wanted nothing more than this — to be allowed to remain forever just as we were now. I would not dare let my thoughts dwell on the future.

In the midst of my muse the room grew warmer and brighter again: Dr. Zelig had come back.

"Evangeline," said he, in a low voice, "it is a lovely evening: let me take you out for a walk."

I could not help going. No, though I was afraid something might be said that I had no right to hear, I really could not help going.

"I have n't claimed you very often lately, have I, Evangeline?" said he, offering his arm as we walked out of the yard. "Don't you think I've been pretty good? You can say to yourself, 'The man is a trial, but there's one redeeming thing about him; he has n't tormented me as much as I feared.'"

"Oh! I shan't say that, sir: I don't call my friends trials."

"Don't you, though? Uncle Paoli and I may both thank our stars for that."

"I did n't make any allusion to Uncle Paoli, sir; it was you who dragged him in."

"Did n't allude to Uncle Paoli? And I was flattering myself all the while that I stood next to him on your list of friends!"

"Oh, but you don't, you're nowhere near him," said I, laughing, and trying to draw away the hand he had taken.

"How cruel! I will own I am jealous of Uncle Paoli."

But he had let my hand go free.

"You would n't come and read to me, Evangeline, if I were in his place. You would n't pet me, and steep such nice tisanes that I should count it a blessed privilege to be sick."

"No, sir, I think I should give you up to Aunt Filura."

"Yes, I'll warrant you would! I almost wish I were sixty years old, Evangeline, and one of the forlornest of God's creatures, for then I should be sure of a passport to your favor."

"Perhaps so; if you would n't grumble at everything I did for you."

"Does Uncle Paoli presume to grumble at you, his devoted little slave?"

"Oh, yes, when you're not in the room. I think he's a little in awe of you; but he has grown so familiar with me since I've been with him so much that his politeness never acts as the least restraint."

"I'll put a stop to that. It shan't be allowed!" said Dr. Zelig, vehemently.

"Please don't talk to him. Why, it's nothing! It relieves his feelings to have somebody to scold at; and why should I care what he says when I don't love him? If I loved him it would break my heart."

"So you persist in wearing yourself out for him, you little pale girl, merely because you don't love him, and because he abuses you?"

"No, indeed, because he is such a miserable old soul, and so sick. You consider him very sick, don't you?"

"Yes, I do; still he may live long enough to be the death of some of his friends," said the doctor, with a glance at me which was much more pitying than I deserved.

"Oh, you need n't be anxious about me. You talk as if I had the care of him, Dr. Zelig. If he wears anybody out, it will be your Aunt Filura."

"Yes, she's another sister of charity. Strange how some people find their greatest pleasure in giving themselves a hard time! Self-sacrifice is their vital air. But if you ever noticed it, such martyrs are always women."

I laughed to myself, for I happened to know through Clum that "Uncle Zeke" had watched three whole nights the past week with a bedridden old soldier, whom everybody else was tired of befriending. If any man living enjoyed being spent for other people, it was Dr. Zelig, though he took pride in pretending to be rather unfeeling.

"Well," said he, as we walked slowly along in the moonlight by the bank of the Seine, "let us discuss the matter a little further. Have you any idea Uncle Paoli appreciates your attentions, and would return them if you were sick?"

"Oh, dear! I should hope not."

"So I thought. Your behavior does seem like disinterested benevolence. You don't act like what you call a Christian-in-law."

"You say that because you don't know," returned I faintly, aware that I had n't the patience with Uncle Paoli which he supposed; yet I did enjoy Dr. Zelig's praise, nevertheless.

"Unselfishness is not a paying investment," said he, as we stood a moment watching the boats sail down the river; "it finds no true appreciation, it is its own reward. Now there's my Aunt Filura; I tell you there's not a grander woman on earth; but how many people know it?"

"She does n't care whether it's known or not."

"There's the very point. She is like one of those Alpine flowers, blossoming high up in the rocks, where the foot of man never treads, and where there's only God to see it. That's true goodness, that's spiritual beauty, Evangeline."

Then we walked on, for the ground was cold. A belated autumn leaf, without any grave to sleep in, skipped across our path in a frenzy of despair.

"I wish we might have snow," said I.

"Snow!" repeated Dr. Zelig; and then there fell a dreaded pause. "Evangeline, if I should resume the conversation we began some weeks ago, would it be taking an unfair advantage? We could n't either of us run away this time, you know. You remember what I said that evening?"

"You did n't say anything — quite!" stammered I, very inconsiderately.

"Well, then I'll say it quite, so there shall be no chance for a misunderstanding. Ever since I learned to know you, Evangeline, you have been growing into my affections, till it would be the most difficult thing I ever attempted in my life to tear you out. Indeed, it does n't seem to me I could possibly do it. There, is that perfectly plain?"

It certainly was.

"Won't you tell me whether you are sorry or glad?"

"O Dr. Zelig, I — don't know."

There was another pause; and as he had slightly turned away, I ventured to peep at him just an instant. He was perplexed. I could see that.

"Perhaps, Evangeline, you have n't had time enough yet to think," said he, in a constrained voice.

"Oh, I don't want to think, I try not to."

"But not thinking is very bad; that is just where Vic stumbled, you remember."

"Well, that was so different, Dr. Zelig! Sometimes it's dangerous to think, and it's our duty to keep from it."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said he, in a much brisker tone. "Then you need n't think. On the whole I'd rather you'd answer a few questions."

"If you'll please change the subject, sir."

"To what? Moonshine, say? Well, how does the moonlight affect your spirits to-night, Evangeline? Do you find it depressing?"

"Oh, not at all!"

"Are you quite happy, then?"

"Yes, very."

"And contented to walk a little farther with me?"

"Yes, sir."

"What! After all my confessions? That's rather encouraging," said he, taking my hand again; and this time I saw he was determined to keep it.

"O Dr. Zelig! what have I said that's the least encouraging?"

"Not a syllable, my precious child! You're the

pink of discretion ; but what under the sun makes you so discreet I'm bound to find out. I've been very patient, Evangeline ; you'll own that. I've tried not to frighten you ; but now can't you say one little pleasant word to make me happy ? "

" Indeed, I don't dare ! "

" And why not ? Don't let me beat my brains out, darling, trying to guess riddles. "

" I should think you could guess this very easily, Dr. Zelie. Just think how dreadful it would be for me to leave Vic ! "

" Is that all, — positively all ? And you do care just a little for me, dear ? "

" Oh, but I promised her ! " cried I. " You would n't have me break a sacred promise ? "

What did he do then but laugh ?

" You blessed little flower of innocence, if you can't find a bigger bugbear than that ! "

" Please, Dr. Zelie, don't laugh ! "

" Suppose Vic should take it into her head to leave *you*, Evangeline ? "

" Well, in that case, you know, sir — "

" Ah, in that case ! So you *will* hold out a little hope, like sunshine on the farthest planet ? "

" Now, Dr. Zelie, you're teasing me ? "

" No, dear ; it's you who are teasing me, only you don't know it. You expect me to mail my heart in cold steel till Clum — "

" Why, I never once thought of Clum. "

" Well, till Vic — "

" But, Dr. Zelie, she is very wretched, and I can't

let myself be happy away from her with somebody else ; it would be cruel. Do pray listen to reason."

"I'm afraid, my dear girl, I'm not prepared to do so just now ; you'll have to excuse me."

"Now, Dr. Zelig," said I, in despair, "considering that you're a conscientious man, you treat my scruples very lightly."

"Yes, you expected me to be suppressed at once, — now, didn't you? Well, you see I'm a man of considerable perseverance, and tremendous obstacles don't scare me a bit. But I'll tell you what would have crushed me completely."

"What?"

"Well, if you had answered me a while ago that the moonlight made you wretched, and you were in a hurry to get home and away from me, that would have been a death-blow, Evangeline."

Ah, how sly he had been with his questions !

"But now, my little lady, since you do me the honor to seem tolerably contented in my society, you'll have to tease a good while before I'll give you up."

His cheek almost touched mine as he spoke. It was dreadful to have him talk and act so ; but I couldn't feel half so bad as I ought.

"It will be easy enough to make Vic listen to reason, — a great deal easier, I assure you, than to make me," added Dr. Zelig ; "and with your kind permission I'll undertake it."

"Oh, not yet, — please not yet ! Can't we be just friends a little while longer?"

"I do think you're rather hard on me, dear ! Would

it be for your happiness? Tell me truly, Evangeline?"

"Yes, oh, yes! I was thinking just now I should be perfectly happy if it were not for the awful tendency everything in this world has to come to a crisis."

"And so it is just friends, is it?" said he, as we stood at last, after much more talk, within the hall at the Du Souchets'. "Can't you bid me good-night, then?"

"But I shall see you again in the parlor."

"Yes, before all the people."

"Well, good-night, Dr. Zelie."

"I guess we are going to have a fall of snow," said he, smiling, and giving me a sudden kiss on the forehead. "There, am I not good to claim no more than that? But, dear, can't you say anything a trifle warmer than 'Dr. Zelie'?"

"Well, good-night, my friend."

"That will have to do for the present, I suppose. Good-night, my — Evangeline!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

VIC'S STORY.

SATISFACTORY CONCLUSIONS.

"The gods do test our worth,
And ere they grant high boons our hearts would sift."

VAN did love Dr. Zelig dearly, and she was an angel of goodness to postpone her engagement on my account. I was in a most woe-begone state of mind at best, which did n't promise well for our coming *examination* at Hôtel de Ville, and if I had known that my best friend cared less for me than for somebody else, I don't know what would have become of me. I plodded away at my studies, and feigned an air of gayety; but Van knew I suffered, and she devoted herself to making me happy.

Wasn't Dr. Zelig good to allow it, and only see his Evangeline at odd moments, when she could be spared from me and Uncle Paoli? I haven't forgotten it in Uncle 'Zeke to this day.

For the next few weeks Mr. Daugherty declined more rapidly. It was not often that Mr. Ulmer left him for even a short trip; but one day he rallied a little, and Lucius ran up to Havre to see that rolling stone of a Peters on board a New York steamer.

I took a long breath, and went at once to visit Uncle

Paoli. It was a comfort to go to him without the risk of meeting his sandy-haired nephew. When Van and I entered the sick-room it seemed to me Mr. Daugherty's eyes were set in deeper hollows, and his voice sounded farther off than ever, but he greeted us with unusual warmth, calling Van all the childish pet names he could think of. Dr. Zelig had been with him, but was just leaving; he lingered a few moments, talking to Van in the doorway, and I observed how bright both their faces were, and how regretfully he dropped her hand when he said he must go, he had urgent business.

"Come back here, Doctor!" exclaimed Uncle Paoli, raising his head with sudden energy. "Vandeely, call to him to come back."

"What do you want, sir?" asked Dr. Zelig, returning, and leaning over the pillow almost affectionately. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing now; but I shall want something by and by, and you mustn't go out of the city, now remember. Be back by four o'clock."

"You said the same thing yesterday, sir, and day before, and I came at your bidding; but you can't expect me to do it every day, unless there is a particular reason."

"There is a particular reason," returned Uncle Paoli in a loud whisper, intended to be strictly confidential.

"Then I will come," said Dr. Zelig, with an indulgent smile.

"It's too bad for him to keep 'Zekiel running back and forth so much," said Aunt Filura; "but then he takes it into account that a sick man's notions ought to be humored."

Dr. Zelie did return at four o'clock, not expecting Uncle Paoli wanted anything more than the sight of his face, and the chance to say to him, "O Doctor, I feel dreadful slim! How long think I can stand it this way?" On the contrary the patient received him eagerly, exclaiming, "I've got some business on my mind, and Lucius ain't much acquainted in Paris, so I want you to help me."

Van was brushing his long hair, which had assumed now a wholesome silvery hue.

"Put away that brush, and come here and kiss me, Vandeely. What is man? He is a creature six feet high, with less than two quarts of brains; yes, and can't count on his life from one minute to the next; so if he's got anything to do he'd better be up and doing it."

There was a solemnity in Uncle Paoli's manner that was quite impressive.

"There, you and Victory are going off. That's right. Girls like you don't understand business."

We neither understood nor cared anything about what was going on. We knew Clum went out, and returned with a strange gentleman, whom he conducted up-stairs. We heard the door open and shut, and then a murmur of voices. Presently Aunt Filura came up from the kitchen with a worried look on her face and a streak of coal-dust withal. She had been making some wine-jelly for Uncle Paoli, and it did n't seem to thicken; she was afraid she had forgotten sister Polly's recipe. Van went off with her to pass judgment on the compound, and I curled into a corner of the sofa with a book which I could n't read, the air was so full of sickness and pain. I lay there a long while, thinking, till

I could n't bear it any longer. Henriette and Clarice were late in coming from school, and I must go and hunt up Van.

But at that moment there was a moving of chairs overhead, and directly after I heard Clum descending the stairs, followed by the strange gentleman, who walked with a brisk, ringing step, and closed the hall-door behind him with a business-like slam.

"All alone, Vic? Why, where is everybody?" said Clum, coming into the parlor and drawing a *fauteuil* near the sofa.

"In the kitchen, bringing science to bear on jelly."

"Oh, well, I hope you've had something interesting to read."

It did my heart good to hear the youth speak in that friendly tone; and he looked at me, too, in a sort of compassionate way. I could n't imagine why: I was no more to be pitied then than I had been all along through my ill-doings.

"How is Uncle Paoli now?"

When I felt embarrassed with Clum I usually inquired about Uncle Paoli.

"His business exhausted him," said he, with a sudden frown. "He wants it quiet. Uncle Zeke is trying to doze in the easy-chair. You know he and Lucius Ulmer have taken turns watching. Uncle Zeke won't have me round nights."

"No, he thinks I've made you lose sleep enough for one season, I suppose. O Clum! I feel such a precious wretch when I look at your poor hand!"

"Don't look at it, then, I beg, though I consider it a very respectable member."

"Honorary member, you mean. I'm sure it has n't been of the least use to you since I broke it," said I, ready to wail at sight of the stiff, swollen wrist, which he was moving triumphantly this way and that, to prove it was growing stronger.

"Oh! I've seen the worst of it," said Clum, lightly. "It might have been a great deal more serious,—for instance, if you'd broken my heart," he added, with an odd laugh.

It was the first time since his letter that he had made the faintest allusion to hearts, and it took me so by surprise that I could n't retort.

"I'm thinking how it would have set me up three months ago, Vic, if you'd showed this kind interest then," continued he, in a tone of amused contempt. "I suppose I should really have believed you felt a regard for me, over and above your conscientious scruples concerning my bones."

"Well — " I began, just above my breath, and then I stopped. What could I say?

"You see what a simple chicken I was, Vic. I did n't know girls were three-sided, like a prism. I thought they were as transparent as window-glass."

O Clum, Clum! How could you sit there and stab me with those cruel words?

"Ah, indeed?" said I. "And now, if the lecture is over, we'll close with music, if you please."

If I had n't rushed away to the piano I'm pretty sure I should have broken down. Next minute Van came in,—I'd rather have seen her than a white-robed seraph,—and after drumming a few arpeggios with the soft pedal down,—not to disturb Uncle Paoli, and

to convince Clum my mind was serene,—I ran upstairs with Van to bid our patient good-by. He was sleeping quietly. We closed the door noiselessly, and came away.

Next morning the Du Souchets sent us the solemn message that Uncle Paoli had passed into the sleep that knows no waking. We went to the house at once. There was a strange hush about it; all ordinary sounds seemed muffled by the fall of death.

"It was about two hours ago," whispered Henriette. "The last word he said was 'Vandeely,' though before that he had been talking about his wife and his boy that died in California."

Aunt Filura led us up-stairs. The south wind was blowing in at the window, stirring the white curtains and the leaves of the flowers Van had set on the table last night. On the bed lay the familiar figure of poor Uncle Paoli, "untreasured."

Aunt Filura uncovered the face reverently, diffidently almost; and it suddenly came over me how in life Uncle Paoli would have resented such a liberty. But seeing his peaceful, happy look, the feeling passed away. I realized what is meant by "the dignity of death."

Van took his thin, cold hand in hers, crying bitterly.

"I did n't know you cared so much for him, Van," whispered I, crying myself from sympathy.

"I did n't care half so much as I ought," sobbed she, "and that's what makes me feel so. Oh, I wish I had really loved him!"

She could not have been more pricked in her conscience if she had had a hint then of what she was to know three days afterwards.

It was the afternoon of the funeral, and we were all assembled in the parlor at the Du Souchets' to listen to the reading of Uncle Paoli's will. By "all" I mean the Du Souchet family, Mr. Ulmer, Van, and myself. We had but just returned from attending Uncle Paoli's poor, worn-out body to its last resting-place in the beautiful grounds of Père la Chaise, and yet here he was about to speak to us again through his lawyer, — the strange gentleman whom Clum had summoned last week.

As chief mourner and probable heir, Lucius Ulmer had placed himself in the middle of the group, wearing an air of ostentatious humility, as who should say, "This is my own personal bereavement, yea, and this wealth also is mine, yet am I not proud."

Right opposite him, in the corner, sat my little Van, with eyelids downcast, and hands crossed on her lap. At her left was Dr. Zelig, and I had crept near her on the other side to be as far as possible out of Mr. Ulmer's way.

The lawyer pinched his spectacles over his nose, coughed impressively, and unrolled the legal-looking document. Uncle Paoli's money had all been made by the rise of real estate many years ago, but with his usual caution he had "tied it up safely" in National Bank stocks and bonds of the State of Massachusetts; hence the will was short. It ran this way: —

"I, Paoli Daugherty, formerly of Boston, Mass., U. S. A., now resident in Paris, France, of sound mind, but terribly afflicted in body, die, seized and possessed —"

Here followed the items, amounting to two hundred thousand dollars; whereupon the bereaved nephew

raised his head in surprise, for the sum was much larger than he had anticipated. The surprise deepened to amazement as the lawyer read on in a dry, even tone : —

“ And I hereby bequeath to Vandelia, daughter of the late William Asbury, of Quinnebasset, Maine, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, all in shares on the Canal Bank of Portland, Maine, the same to belong to her and her heirs forever. She has been a good, kind girl to me in my sickness, and I love her as I do my own kin. As I leave my nephew, Lucius Ulmer, more than he expected, he has no call to find fault.”

At the sound of her own name, Van looked up with a blank expression, as if she were stunned. I don't think she understood it for half a minute. I had recovered from the first surprise, and had gone to wondering how Mr. Ulmer would bear it, before Van fairly came to her senses. Then a great tide of color swept over her face ; it seemed as if she were going to rise and speak, but that would n't have been possible for a timid girl like her.

I looked at Mr. Ulmer. I saw his first flash of amazement, and after that of indignation. He may have thought this had been managed somehow, probably by me, for his glance went right by Van and rested on my face angrily. It was only for an instant, it is true, and I never blamed him. After waiting all his life for dead men's shoes, it was rather vexing to have an eighth of his fortune passed over to the twin-sister of the very girl who had — no, whom *he* had rejected. But he behaved beautifully, I'll give him the credit of it. He went up to Van after a very short

hesitation, and congratulated her like a gentleman. Clum and Dr. Zelig and Aunt Filura, who had been witnesses to the will, were looking on to see how they would both behave.

"O Mr. Ulmer!" said Van, "it ought not to be so; it is n't mine, and I can't keep it."

She repeated that again and again, in spite of Mr. Ulmer's polite protestations and my little warning pinches. Van is so set in her way and has such high-flown ideas that I was really afraid the whole legacy would vanish in smoke; but law-matters are not so gaseous, as I soon discovered. Uncle Paoli's words on that sheet of paper were as sacred as if he had spoken them from the other world with angelic lips, and far more binding in court.

Everybody was so glad for Van. Aunt Filura said she was no more fit to teach school than a baby, and Uncle Paoli had told her in confidence a year ago that he meant to do something handsome by Vandeely. She was n't very rugged, but he guessed Victory could take care of herself.

We had our suspicions afterwards that Uncle Paoli might have had a remote idea of a marriage between Van and Lucius, which would restore the property to his family. Perhaps he wanted to make her attractive and "worth having," so she might outshine "that high-fly sister of hers." But we did not think of this at the time.

Of course Van behaved like an angel, and it is needless to mention it. My approving of Van is like Mr. Ulmer's approving of Clum's French accent: it is simply superfluous.

She behaved like an angel, and I tried to appear like a lady ; but that evening after supper tears kept welling to my eyes, such as I should n't have shed for Uncle Paoli, and which I was bound I would n't shed for his money. Not that it was his money I minded, though, and I was n't jealous of blessed pale Van ; but it is dreadful to have no friends, and to feel that even departed shades frown upon you.

I don't think anybody observed me but Clum, and I know he did ; for when we were walking home together he said, " I've been longing for the chance to indignate with you, Vic ! It's a sin and a shame for you to be left out in the cold in this way."

I knew he referred to money, not chilled affections.

" But Uncle Paoli was n't called upon to remember me in his will, Clum. I never did anything for him."

" Well, what if you did n't ? He would n't let you. Ulmer told his own side of the story, and set him against you, I'll warrant."

" Yes, I think that's true."

" Besides, Vic, if Mr. Daugherty was going to keep debt and credit, why did n't he do something for Aunt Filura ?"

" Perhaps he had heard of her saying he had hurt himself with hair-dye, and was offended," said I, between laughing and crying. " But he did give her something, Clum ; he gave her quite a sizeable gold-piece one day when his minister was in the room."

" Why, it's the first I ever heard of it," cried Clum. " That is better than he served Uncle Zeke. Do you know he never paid him one franc for all his medical attendance ? He merely remarked, ' I believe you said

you'd doctor me for nothing, did n't you? I'm sure that's cheap enough, and I'm much obleeged to you.' "

I laughed till I was positively ashamed, remembering the man I laughed at was lying in his grave.

"Don't think I'm a perfect heathen, Clum; my nerves are a little shaken, that's all."

Months ago I should n't have thought of apologizing to him in that way, for I should n't have been afraid of his considering me cold-hearted; but it was different now.

"And, Clum, I will say this for myself, and you're bound to believe me: If either of us twins was to have this money, and it could n't be both, I'm glad it came to Van, for she is a frail child, and is n't able to work. As for me, I'm strong, you know, and can battle with the world."

"O Vic, Vic!" said Clum, seizing my hand, but dropping it immediately, saying, "Good-night," and running off as fast as a fireman who has heard a fire-alarm from his own box.

But I need n't have gone into heroics, for Van wasted no time in declaring she should share her money with me to the last sou. I supposed wills were such solemn, arbitrary things that it could n't be done; but Dr. Zelig said there was n't the least trouble about it, and after that Van was happy.

Her first thought, you may be sure, was to pay our debt to brother Morris; and after that we should each have a modest little competence of ten thousand dollars or more. It seemed quite a fortune to us.

It was early in March that Uncle Paoli died, and

there were still three or four months of hard study if we were to try for diplomas.

"But of course you won't do it," said Dr. Zelig.
"That's sheer nonsense now."

"To be sure it is," replied I, and looked at Van, expecting her to say the same; but she had set her face like a flint.

"We can't tell what may happen to either of us; and wouldn't it be safest and wisest to carry out this plan?" said she, raising her eyes to Dr. Zelig's face with the sweetest smile of deference and dove-like meekness.

"For obstinacy commend me to you gentle women!" said he, laughing, and never uttered another syllable of opposition.

He was a very sharp-cornered man, but I could n't help seeing Van would rule him completely.

I was beginning to see a good deal. When two people adore each other's very shadows, they must give some sign of it, especially if one of the parties is an impulsive person like Dr. Zelig.

It so happened that we were all three on the street together one day, and went into a jeweller's to have a tiny photograph of papa set in the locket-charm of my watch. While I was talking about it to one of the clerks, Dr. Zelig fell to examining a case of rings.

"There, that exactly takes my fancy, Evangeline," said he.

It was an amethyst set in pearls.

The words, and the look he gave Van were a revelation to me. "They not only love each other, but they have spoken of it," thought I. And then I evolved an

idea "out of my own consciousness": "They are too tenderly careful of my poor old feelings to let me know it." I enticed Van one side to show her a wonderful clock.

"I understand it all," said I. "Tell Dr. Zelig to buy the ring and put it on your finger. It's customary with all lovers except Quakers."

"Why, Victoria Asbury! what do you mean?" said Van, blushing beautifully.

"Or if you have a delicacy about asking him to buy it, I'll mention it myself. What sayest thou, my own Evangeline?"

"Do you really wish him to do it?" asked she, demurely, with a searching glance at my face.

Then I knew the whole story, and without waiting for my magnanimity to cool I went up to Dr. Zelig, and remarked in a low tone, "Won't you please buy the amethyst ring for my sister Vandelia, and give it to her with my blessing?"

It was such a sentimental speech that I should have broken down and dropped a shower of pearls on Dr. Zelig's sleeve if I had n't rushed off to another counter.

It was all settled now, and I had been the means of it. I could n't help having a better opinion of myself from that minute, especially as I never let Van see me shed a tear. There was a contented, happy light in her eyes that I could n't help envying, but I was n't going to let her know it.

We still kept up our Shakespeare Club, and I will insist it was a little good of me to go, not to disappoint Van, when Dr. Zelig always appropriated her coming

home, leaving me a pensioner on Clum's gallantry. Clum was perfectly polite always, but I could n't help feeling as if he wished me out of the way.

The months rolled round to July, when Helen and Morris came to Paris to make the final arrangements for our home voyage. The weather had grown very warm, and we hardly ventured out-of-doors in the day-time, but several evenings Morris took us boating on the Seine. Of course, Dr. Zelig, being almost in the family, went with us, but Clum had n't any such excuse, and feeling as he did towards me I wondered he should always accept Morris's invitations.

The last night we sailed, Henriette and Mr. Theobald were of the party. We were all less lively than usual, for we knew this was the end of our pleasuring in Paris. The day before, Van and I had passed our examination at the Hôtel de Ville very creditably — though I say it that should n't. But if I don't say it how are you to know? We had been toiling and molling two years for our diplomas, and now we had obtained them, and straightway we were going home. I was half wild at the prospect of seeing mother, yet "teary round the lashes" at thought of leaving so many friends; for these last months my friends had been gradually coming back to me, — all but Clum. I was n't sure he approved of me any more now than when he wrote me that dreadful letter saying I was "in two deep." True, he had n't pelted me with icicles for a long time. but that was because I was going away so soon. I'd heard one naturally felt compassionate towards a retreating enemy.

"Good-by, old Seine! It breaks my heart to part

with you," said I, theatrically, as Clum walked up the bank with me from the boat.

"Poor little heart!" laughed he. "The number of times it has been broken and mended is an anatomical curiosity."

Now he did n't mean the least harm by that remark; but my nerves were already quivering, and I could n't bear what I thought was a taunt.

"O Clum!" said I, "what have I said or done to you that makes you dislike me so?"

"Dislike you, Vic? I have n't the capacity."

"You think I'm a deceitful creature; you said so last March, just before Uncle Paoli died. I had as many sides as a prism, you said."

"Well, I did n't mean it."

"People should always say what they mean, Clum."

"I've changed my mind then, Vic, and I vowed I'd tell you so to-night. I should have told you so before, only it was a tough thing to do, and you did n't seem to care what I thought of you."

"Did n't care!" What extraordinary eyes the boy had!

"I do you tardy justice, Vic, but I will say you're the truest, noblest, most generous girl I ever saw."

Those words from Clum! They pierced deep into my heart till they came to the artesian well hidden there, and then the tears bubbled up, but I had presence of mind not to take out my handkerchief.

"And I've been a miserable sinner to call you a flirt."

"Well," responded I, "'We're all miserable sinners,' saith the prayer-book."

"I'd no right to set myself in judgment over you, Vic ; but don't remember it against a fellow, I beg of you !"

He walked me on at a tearing pace for about two squares before he spoke again.

"Look here, Vic, I've made the humblest apology I'm capable of. Won't you take me back into your good graces? or shall I fall on my knees to you?"

"Oh don't ! I'll pardon you standing," said I, smiling up at the gilt-edged great dipper. "But what have *you* done, Clum? I'm sure you've behaved like a seraph compared to me."

"Bless your heart, Vic ! Did n't I say you were the most generous girl alive?"

Then we walked on very slowly.

"That ought to satisfy me, Vic ; but the truth is, it does n't. You know you are more to me than any other girl in the world," added he, skipping a pebble along the pavement with the toe of his boot.

My spirits had rebounded by this time from freezing point to summer heat.

"You're going away, and I must say it. If you should refuse me a second time, Vic, it would n't be because some one else stood in the way?"

"A second time?"

"It would be because you really don't feel inclined towards me, Vic?"

"I—I don't know about that, Clum."

"Hearts can't be controlled, Vic. You never did feel for me as I've felt for you from the very first, and I ought not to expect it. If I was n't an old blunder-head I should n't allude to it again, and run the risk of losing your friendship."

"Friendship?" echoed I.

"Yes, I knew it could be nothing more, Vic; still I can't say I'm prepared to stand it very well," said he, picking up a bit of stick and tossing it into the street. "Somehow I'd been almost hoping, lately — well, no matter. There now, you darling girl, I've been hurting your feelings."

For I was laughing behind my handkerchief at Clum's warlike demeanor.

"O Vic! you pity me, but pray don't. You're not to blame. You've refused me because you can't love me, and I hope I have more pluck than —"

"Refused you? When?"

"Why, just now. But, Vic, no one could have taken more pains to soften the blow."

"I don't refuse before I'm asked," said I, hysterically; "and, Columbus Du Souchet, if you think you've proposed to me this time any more than you did before, you're very much mistaken."

"O Vic! what do you mean? You're not laughing at me?"

"Why, Clum, once you proposed to Van, and once you asked me if I thought you'd be a discipline to the girl you married, and afterwards you wrote me a letter to take it all back."

"Zounds! so I did. O Vic! our acquaintance has been a Comedy of Errors from the first."

Then we both laughed, and Clum tossed away an envelope he had picked up.

"Well, I've tried twice before, and they say the third time never fails. I offered myself to you point blank just now, did n't I, Vic?"

"Oh, no, Clum! You merely told me you should n't do it, and did n't mean to," said I, covering my face with my hands to hide my blushes.

"Victoria Asbury, if you keep me in suspense another minute I'll go and hang myself!"

"Ugh! the idea! Then you'd be in a state of everlasting suspense."

He drew my hands away from my face at that, and his voice was less desperate as he added, "You said once if you ever married 't would be a tongue-tied man, Vic, and here 's your chance. Besides, you know I love you to distraction."

Then I ventured to look up. "If you love me like that, Clum ~"

But when you 're telling a story I suppose you ought to keep the reader in an agony of uncertainty, so I shan't repeat another word of the conversation.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AND SO FORTH.

Read this chapter, and then guess which wrote it.

AND now the rest of the story of the twins is like the tent of Peri Benou in the Arabian tale: it may be compressed into a nutshell or expanded to cover a kingdom. Putting it into a nutshell, it is this:—

Early in July they bade good-by to their friends in Paris, and in company with Helen and Morris Lynde came to Quinnebasset. There it was that they began this double-threaded story in the manner recorded in the first chapter.

It had been their fixed intention to teach the following autumn, but since Uncle Paoli's legacy it was no longer imperative to do this.

"It was no more than fair that she should have her daughters to herself the last year of their single lives." their mother said, smiling. So they stayed at Quinnebasset, and taught Bel and little Morris music and French, and took lessons themselves in housekeeping, in the pauses between receiving friends and teaing out; and they wrote long and frequent letters to Paris, from

August till May of the following year, when Dr. Zelig came to Massachusetts, bringing Aunt Filura and the whole Du Souchet family, and planting them at the Zelig homestead, — all but Henriette, who was married the same month to Mr. Theobald, and lives in New York. Dr. Zelig has taken his nephew into partnership, and their practice is becoming quite extensive.

Clum has discarded the silver cross-bones, as tending, he jestingly declares, to suggest unpleasant reflections upon his profession. When he has "got a little forehanded," as poor Uncle Paoli would say, he expects to marry "that high-flyer of a Victory," who humbly hopes, in time, to grow worthy of being Van's niece. She says there are twenty-eight thousand more women than men in America, and that is why she chose a Frenchman; she did n't think it was fair to marry an American. So you perceive if there is to be another double wedding in the family, Van is n't the one that'll keep anybody waiting. You've heard the fable of the hare and the tortoise? Well, Dr. Zelig threw it in Vic's face one day, laughing, but she told him tortoises liked to wait, it seemed to be constitutional. Something has agreed with Van, certainly; she grows stronger and healthier every day.

All the dispute between her and her niece elect just now, appears to be which shall have Aunt Filura. They both claim her, but as they are to live in the same town they may settle it by rotation. Vic knows where the good woman's choice would lie, but counting on her benevolence is sure she shall have a piece of her at odd times. Clarice and Etienne will remain at their grandfather's.

· Is it necessary to make any allusion to Mr. Ulmer? Vic received his wedding-cards not long ago, elegantly engraved, and of the very latest style. His bride is a fashionable lady, of great beauty, and they move in the highest circles at Washington; but the report that he is a candidate for the presidency is a mistake.

There is no end of things to say, and I would throw in some of the future plans of the twins, but those, I know, are like a Quaker sermon, "best said unsaid"; so I drop the pen, girls dear, with a warm hand-shake and a hearty good-by, and may you all be as happy as your affectionate friends,

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